

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT
PREECLAMPSIA, HEART DISEASE AND
PREVENTION, VISIT THESE WEB SITES:

Preeclampsia Foundation:
www.preeclampsia.org

HELLP Syndrome Society:
www.hellpsyndrome.org

DASH diet:
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/
heart/hbp/dash/index.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/index.htm)

General diet and activity:
www.mypyramid.gov

BMI calculator:
[www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/
bmicalc.htm](http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm)

Quit Plan (for smokers):
www.quitplan.com

Heart health for women:
www.hearthealthywomen.org

Women's health:
www.healthywomen.org



PREECLAMPSIA
foundation

This brochure is for informational purposes only. This information should not replace the advice of your professional health care provider. This brochure is part of an ongoing commitment to collaboration with the HELLP Syndrome Society.

Copyright© 2007 Preeclampsia Foundation

The Link Between
PREECLAMPSIA
and
HEART DISEASE®

PREVENTING HEART DISEASE
LATER IN LIFE



PREECLAMPSIA
foundation

WHAT IS PREECLAMPSIA?

Preeclampsia is a serious problem for as many as 1 in 12 women during pregnancy. It generally occurs after the 20th week and is marked by a sudden increase in blood pressure (development of hypertension) and protein in the urine.

Preeclampsia is the leading known cause of premature birth. It must be watched closely, as it can threaten the life of both the mother and the child. Currently, the only effective treatment is delivery which, if too premature, may lead to serious complications for the baby.

Preeclampsia warning signs include:

- Sudden weight gain
- Swelling of the face or hands
- Headaches
- Blurred vision
- Chest pain and shortness of breath
- Stomach pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Protein in the urine

Regular prenatal care under the direction of a health professional and monitoring of all the warning signs listed above are vital factors in assessing the well being of mother and child during pregnancy.

WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN PREECLAMPSIA, HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, AND HEART DISEASE?

Women who have had preeclampsia are at higher risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke later in life. Other important markers are the severity of one's preeclampsia and a history of low birth weight babies. This does not mean you will definitely develop these diseases if you had preeclampsia, but it DOES mean you should take extra care to monitor the health of your heart.

Many of the risk factors for preeclampsia and diseases affecting your blood pressure and heart are the same. They include a family history of high blood pressure and heart disease, being overweight, problems with blood clotting, and metabolic syndrome.

Metabolic syndrome is a term for a set of risk factors such as:

- Waist size larger than 35 inches (for women)
- High blood pressure
- High blood sugar
- High blood triglycerides (a type of fat)
- Low HDL ("good" cholesterol)

If you have three or more of these symptoms, physicians consider you to have metabolic syndrome.

WHAT CAN I DO TO REDUCE MY RISK FOR HEART DISEASE?

Know your family health history

If you have a history of high blood pressure or heart disease in your family, you are more likely to get it later in life. Be sure to tell your care team about your family's health history.

Live a healthy life

Eat a heart-healthy diet and get regular exercise (such as walking 30 to 60 minutes five or more times a week). Proper diet and exercise can reduce your risk factors for heart disease

Stay at a healthy weight

Body mass index (BMI) measures your body fat based on your height. A healthy BMI is between 19 and 25. A BMI greater than 25 may increase your risk for heart disease. Check your BMI at the website on the back of this brochure.

If your BMI is too high, talk to your doctor about losing weight. Lowering your weight can lower your blood pressure and improve cholesterol levels

If you smoke, stop!

You should also try to avoid second-hand smoke. Tobacco raises blood pressure and damages blood vessels.

Talk with your doctor about aspirin

Taking low-dose aspirin may reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Know your numbers

BLOOD PRESSURE: A healthy blood pressure is around 120/80. If your blood pressure is higher, talk to your care provider. Ask about ways to lower your blood pressure.

CHOLESTEROL: Talk to your doctor about tracking your cholesterol (blood fats). If your levels are high, ask how you can lower them. Aim for these levels:

- Total cholesterol: less than 200* (5.2)
- HDL (good cholesterol): more than 50 (1.3)
- LDL (bad cholesterol): less than 100 (2.6)
- Triglycerides: less than 150 (3.9)

BLOOD GLUCOSE (BLOOD SUGAR): Talk to your doctor about tracking blood sugar levels. If they are high, ask how you can lower them.

- Normal: less than 100 (5.6)
- Pre-diabetes: 100 to 125 (5.6–6.9)
- Diabetes: more than 126 (7.0)

* mg/dl (SI units in parentheses)