

Postnatal hypertension (high blood pressure)

Advice for women after pregnancy

This leaflet is for women who had hypertension (high blood pressure) in her pregnancy or shortly after delivery. This includes women who had:

- hypertension before pregnancy
- gestational hypertension (GH, also known as pregnancy induced hypertension or PIH)
- pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure and protein in the urine)

Women who had raised blood pressure during pregnancy, have a greater risk of health problems in future pregnancies and in later life. This risk can be reduced by making healthy lifestyle choices and having regular check-ups with your GP (family doctor). Most women will have their follow up appointments with their midwife and GP.

If you are discharged home on medication you will need to see your GP within two weeks of discharge.

Will I get high blood pressure in my next pregnancy?

If you had high blood pressure before you became pregnant or had blood pressure problems in this pregnancy, you have a greater risk of similar complications in future pregnancies. The risk of complications in any future pregnancies depends on how severe your problem was and how many weeks pregnant you were when the high blood pressure started.

If your blood pressure rose late in your pregnancy (after 37 weeks), there is about a one in ten chance that it will happen again at a similar time or later in your next pregnancy, but is likely to be less severe than the first time.

If your blood pressure rose early and/or had a severe effect on your pregnancy (delivery before 34 weeks, or you had a very small baby), there is about a four in ten chance that you would be affected again. The effect tends to occur later in the next pregnancy, but it can still be severe.

What can I do to help myself?

- have your blood pressure measured at least yearly at your GP's practice, even if it returns to normal after this pregnancy
- stay healthy – see 'Staying healthy' on page 5 for advice
- if you get pregnant again, please make sure you see your GP as soon as possible and tell them about all your pregnancies
- ask your GP about starting low-dose aspirin (75mg daily) from 12 weeks' gestation in your next pregnancy as this can reduce the risk of high blood pressure in pregnancy
- **if you are concerned about your blood pressure or you feel unwell, and your baby is less than four weeks old, please contact your community midwife (using the contact details provided by the hospital). If your baby is four weeks old or more, please contact your GP.**

Will I have high blood pressure when I am older?

If you have had high blood pressure in pregnancy you have an increased risk of having certain health problems later in life, especially if your baby was delivered before 37 weeks. You may be able to reduce the risk of these conditions if you have regular check-ups and make healthy lifestyle choices.

The problems related to high blood pressure include:

- Chronic hypertension = long-term high blood pressure
- Venous thromboembolism = blood clots that can move to the lungs
- Cardiovascular disease = problems with your heart and your blood vessels like palpitations, heart attacks or angina
- Cerebrovascular disease = problems with the blood vessels in your brain such as stroke or ministroke and dementia
- Renal disease = problems with your kidneys that could lead to needing dialysis
- Retinal disease = problems with your eyes, that can lead to poor vision or blindness

Staying healthy

What can I do now?

Make sure your blood pressure is well controlled. This will reduce your chances of complications now and in the future. Make sure you:

- follow the plan for blood pressure checks with your midwife, health visitor and GP
- take your medications as advised. If you have any questions or you run out of medicines, speak to your GP and blood pressure clinic (if you have one).

What can I do long-term?

There are lots of things you can do to try and stay healthy. Talk to your GP if you need help with any of these;

- do regular exercise - for example, 20 minutes fast walking a day
- eat a healthy, balanced diet - your GP can give you advice
- do not drink too much alcohol (less than 14 units a week is advised)
- keep to a healthy weight for your height - your GP or health visitor can give advice
- do not smoke cigarettes or take recreational drugs – for help on quitting see your GP for a local programme
- if you are diabetic, make sure you keep your blood sugars within your targets
- have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked at least once a year by your GP.

Research

We often run research projects to try and improve our knowledge of – and treatments for – blood pressure problems in pregnancy. We may ask you to take part. We will always explain what is involved beforehand. If you decide not to take part, your care will not be affected by your decision.

More information

Action on Pre-eclampsia

Helpline Tel: 020 8427 4217

www.action-on-pre-eclampsia.org.uk

See **NHS Choices** for information on healthy eating and exercise following childbirth:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/keeping-fit-and-healthy.aspx

Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Kings' College Hospital in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Kings College Hospital.

To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

Care provided by students

We are a teaching hospital which provides clinical training for many types of healthcare worker. Our students get practical experience by treating patients under the supervision of a trained member of staff. This is an important part of their training. We understand not everybody wishes to help with training the healthcare workers of tomorrow. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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