



GESTATIONAL HYPERTENSION

What you need to know

Have you just been told that you have gestational hypertension? This information sheet provides answers to the questions you may have.

Definition

Gestational hypertension is high blood pressure in pregnancy. The top number in the blood pressure reading is the systolic pressure and the bottom number is the diastolic pressure. Hypertension is characterized by a **blood pressure reading greater than or equal to (one or both values) 140/90 mmHg**.

What does the blood pressure value mean?

Systolic blood pressure (top number) is the pressure exerted on the artery walls when blood is pumped from the heart. Diastolic blood pressure (bottom number) is the pressure exerted on the artery walls when the heart is at rest.

Symptoms

Pregnant women often have few symptoms related to their hypertension. However, they need to pay close attention and let a health professional know as soon as any of these symptoms appear:

- Ringing in the ears;
- Unusual, persistent headaches;
- Vision problems;
- Abdominal pain in the upper right quadrant (near the liver);
- Generalized swelling that increases suddenly.



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It's not known what **causes** high blood pressure. In some cases, it may be caused by genetic factors or an abnormality in the placenta that causes narrowing of the blood vessels.

Consequences

Gestational hypertension results in decreased blood flow between the mother, the placenta, and the baby. As a result, the baby does not get as much nutrition. High blood pressure can harm the fetus by causing possible growth delays or a decrease in fetal well-being.

Diagnosis

Gestational hypertension is diagnosed by measuring blood pressure. One of the complications of high blood pressure, preeclampsia, can be diagnosed with routine tests such as urine and blood tests.

Follow-up

A mother who is diagnosed with gestational hypertension (and her baby) will be followed more closely during the pregnancy. Here are some other tests that can be done during pregnancy to make sure mother and baby are healthy:

Recommendations to reduce risks

To reduce the risks associated with hypertension, the mother should:

- take the medication prescribed by her doctor;
- follow advice about taking her blood pressure;
- seek medical attention if the above symptoms appear or get worse.

For the mother:

- Urine and blood tests: To check the function of different organs and screen for possible complications.
- Blood pressure monitoring at home.

For the fetus:

- Growth ultrasound, Doppler ultrasound, and others: Based on the medical examinations, additional ultrasounds may be done during the pregnancy.
- Non-stress test: Based on the medical examinations, non-stress tests (fetal monitoring) may be done to make sure the baby is doing well.



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Avoid food, caffeine,
and nicotine for at least
30 minutes before taking
your blood pressure.



How do I take my blood pressure?

- Have a blood pressure monitor in your possession (different models available on the market; to be confirmed with your nurse at the perinatal clinic).
- Choose the appropriate cuff size. An improperly fitting cuff (too small) can falsely raise blood pressure by up to 30 mmHg.
- Sit quietly with your legs uncrossed for at least five minutes before taking your blood pressure.
- Support your arm on a table or a pillow. Your elbow should be lower than your heart. The effort of holding your arm up could raise your blood pressure.
- Follow the instructions on the blood pressure monitor.
- If you need to re-take your blood pressure, wait at least 2-3 minutes before reinflating the cuff or changing arms.
- Keep a record of your readings for your doctor and nurse. If you have any doubts about your results, do not hesitate to bring your blood pressure monitor to your next prenatal appointment.

Interpretation of results

- **Systolic (top number) under 140 or diastolic (bottom number) under 90:** Blood pressure is normal. Follow recommendations to reduce risks.
- **Systolic over 160 or diastolic over 100:** Notify the nurse at the perinatal clinic or birthing centre immediately.
- **Systolic over 140 or diastolic over 90, but under 100:** Take your blood pressure three times a day and lie on your left side for at least an hour, twice a day.

Notify your doctor if there is no change.



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Did you know?

Breastfeeding for more than one month decreases blood pressure; this effect can last for more than 10 years.

Are your blood pressure results abnormal?

Do you have questions or need support?

Feel free to speak to the nurse at your clinic:

Hôpital Anna-Laberge

200 boulevard Brisebois, Châteauguay

- Perinatal clinic | [450-699-2489](tel:450-699-2489)
Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Birth pavilion | [450-699-2463](tel:450-699-2463)
After regular clinic hours, on weekends and holidays

Hôpital du Suroît

150 rue Saint-Thomas, Salaberry-de-Valleyfield

To make an appointment

- Perinatal clinic | [450-371-9920](tel:450-371-9920), ext. 2451

To speak to a nurse

- Mother-child centre | [450-371-9920](tel:450-371-9920), ext. 2148

References:

- Effect of Lactation on Maternal Hypertension: A Systematic Review. Eliana Bonifacino in *Breastfeeding Medicine*, Vol. 13., No. 9 (November 2018).
- Brochure from CISSS Jardins-Roussillon: *Hypertension artérielle gravidique*, by Isabelle Allaite, R.N., Suzanne Denis, R.N., B.Sc., and Mélanie Guérin, R.N., B.Sc., clinical perinatal support (2012).

Our mission

To maintain, improve, and restore the health and well-being of the Québec population by making accessible an array of integrated and quality health and social services, while contributing to the social and economic development of Québec.

Our vision

Accessible and efficient health care and services that adapt to the needs of Québécois.

Our goals

The CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest achieves its goals through its innovative approaches and stands apart through:

- its exemplary offer of care and integrated services based on interdisciplinarity, accessibility, and adaptability to the needs of its population;
- its willingness to question and improve its professional, clinical, and administrative practices;
- its appreciation of its personnel and the implementation of human resource management practices;
- its strong relationships with its partners.

Our values

Our actions are guided by five equal and interconnected values: compassion, collaboration, commitment, confidence and consistency.