

Complications during Pregnancy

There are several medical situations that can occur during pregnancy. Some of the most common complications are summarized here. You can find more information about these and other conditions in your book, **Planning Your Pregnancy & Birth.**

Bleeding during pregnancy is not uncommon. There are many causes for bleeding or spotting especially during early pregnancy. Often spotting will occur after heavy lifting, vigorous activity, or intercourse. However, heavy bright red bleeding or cramping are not normal. If you experience persistent spotting, cramping, or have bleeding like a period, contact our office.

Placenta previa occurs when the placenta lies low in the uterus, partially or completely covering the cervix. Pregnant women with placenta previa will often have bleeding during pregnancy. Sometimes bed rest is necessary to minimize complications. As pregnancy progresses, the placenta can move into a higher position away from the cervical opening. If placenta previa persists at the time of delivery, a cesarean section delivery is necessary.

Pregnancy Induced Hypertension (PIH) is a condition that occurs when a pregnant woman's blood pressure rises. The cause of PIH is unknown. Sometimes blood pressure rises to unhealthy levels which may affect the mother and/or the fetus. When a pregnant woman's blood pressure is extremely elevated, her body attempts to compensate for the higher levels and changes the way blood flows through her body's tissues and organs. Due to this, the baby may receive less oxygen and lower amounts of nutrients. The functions of other organs such as kidneys and liver may also be affected by blood pressure changes.

When blood pressure remains elevated the condition can progress to **preeclampsia, eclampsia, or toxemia.** **Preeclampsia** occurs when a pregnant woman begins to experience signs that her body's function is being affected by her increased blood pressure. **Eclampsia** is when the pregnant woman has seizures as a result of extremely high blood pressures.

Symptoms of **preeclampsia** include:

- Severe headache, unrelieved by acetaminophen and rest
- Visual disturbances
- Excessive weight gain, usually in a short amount of time
- Excessive swelling that occurs quickly
- Sharp, stabbing pain in the upper abdomen that is persistent

Gestational Diabetes is diabetes that occurs during pregnancy. This condition is caused by hormones and usually resolves on its own after pregnancy. Diabetes occurs when the body has trouble making or using insulin. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas that helps to break down sugars and other food sources into substances that the body uses to give us energy. In a diabetic person, blood sugars are not controlled because of the body's impaired abilities to use or make insulin. During pregnancy, abnormal blood sugar levels could increase the risk of health problems with the mother and the baby.

Complications during Pregnancy (Cont'd)

Gestational diabetic women often experience no symptoms. For this reason, a **glucola** test is performed around 28 weeks gestation to determine if a pregnant woman has gestational diabetes. Gestational diabetics are encouraged to follow a special diet and exercise. Both help to keep her blood sugars consistent and within normal limits. Sometimes medications are used to regulate blood sugar levels. In severe cases, insulin shots are needed to control blood sugar levels.

Pre-term Labor is true labor that occurs before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Pre-term labor could lead to pre-term delivery. Babies that are born early are known as premature babies, often called “preemies.” These babies may have health problems because they were born before the last few weeks of pregnancy when many important developmental changes occur. Some pre-term babies will require special care in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

If pre-term labor is detected in its early stages, your doctor will likely try to stop your contractions if delaying delivery does not increase the risk of further complications. Delaying delivery will allow more time for the baby to grow and mature, thus decreasing potential health problems. Rest, hydration, and oral /intravenous medications are a few of the most common interventions used to stop or slow pre-term labor.