



Pregnancy and Stroke

A stroke happens when blood flow to part of the brain is blocked or reduced. Without enough oxygen-rich blood, brain cells begin to die.

Stroke during pregnancy or shortly after delivery is rare, but it can be life-threatening. The risk is highest during the third trimester and in the first six weeks after delivery.

Types of Strokes

There are three main types of stroke:

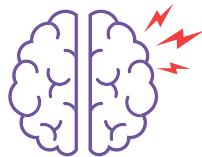
- ✓ **Ischemic stroke** is when a blood vessel supplying blood to the brain is blocked by a clot or fatty deposit (plaque)
- ✓ **Hemorrhagic stroke** is when a blood vessel in the brain ruptures and causes bleeding inside or around the brain
- ✓ **Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)** is often called a “warning stroke” and causes temporary blockage of blood flow to the brain

During pregnancy and postpartum, hemorrhagic strokes are the most common type of stroke.

How Common are Strokes During Pregnancy or Postpartum?

A stroke occurs
in approximately

20 to 40
of every
100,000
pregnancies.



Stroke is estimated to
account for around

4-6%
of pregnancy-related
deaths annually
in the U.S.

Risk Factors

Changes in the body during pregnancy, including changes within the vascular system (vessels that carry blood throughout the body) and hormonal shifts, can raise your risk of stroke. **Several factors may raise that risk, including:**

- ✓ Chronic hypertension (high blood pressure before pregnancy or diagnosed before 20 weeks of pregnancy)
- ✓ Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, such as gestational hypertension and preeclampsia/eclampsia
- ✓ Maternal age (35 years or older)
- ✓ Diabetes
- ✓ Obesity
- ✓ Migraine, particularly migraine with aura
- ✓ Infections
- ✓ Heart or cerebrovascular disease
- ✓ Clotting disorders

How to Reduce Your Risk

- ✓ Manage your blood pressure
- ✓ Stop smoking
- ✓ Eat healthy foods
- ✓ Stay active
- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight
- ✓ If you are on prescription medications, take them as prescribed



Blood Pressure and Stroke

Most strokes related to pregnancy can be prevented with good blood pressure control.

- ✓ Normal blood pressure: **less than 120/80**
- ✓ Healthy blood pressure during pregnancy: **less than 140/90**
- ✓ After pregnancy, your blood pressure can change. Ask your healthcare team what your healthy numbers should be.

Important reminders:

- ✓ If you had high blood pressure during pregnancy, plan to have your blood pressure checked in the first week after you go home (within 3–10 days). Keep a log of your readings and share them with your healthcare team.
- ✓ High blood pressure can develop up to a year postpartum. It's important to keep monitoring your blood pressure.

Know the Warning Signs of Stroke

Stroke is an emergency. Remember **B.E. F.A.S.T.** to recognize the signs of a stroke and act quickly:

B.E. F.A.S.T.

Balance
Loss

Eye (Vision)
Changes

Face
Drooping

Arm
Weakness

Speech
Difficulty

Time to
Call 911

What You Can Do

Talk to your healthcare team about your risk factors. Understanding your risk can help you take meaningful steps to reduce your risk.

Regularly check your blood pressure during and after pregnancy. Talk to your healthcare professional if you experience high readings.

Learn **B.E. F.A.S.T.** so you can recognize the signs and symptoms of stroke. Share these warning signs with your loved ones, so they can act quickly, too.

Learn more about:



Pregnancy
[GoRedforWomen.org/Pregnancy](https://www.GoRedforWomen.org/Pregnancy)



Postpartum
[GoRedforWomen.org/Postpartum](https://www.GoRedforWomen.org/Postpartum)