

# Are you at risk for heart disease during or after pregnancy?



## What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is one of the leading causes of pregnancy-related deaths in California. Heart disease includes a number of conditions that affect the heart, such as:

- ▶ Hypertension, also known as high blood pressure
- ▶ Cardiomyopathy, a condition that causes the heart muscle to become weak or thick, making it difficult for the heart to pump blood effectively
- ▶ Coronary Artery Disease, which causes the heart's vessels to become narrowed, decreasing or blocking blood flow and oxygen to the heart muscle

Heart disease can have immediate pregnancy and postpartum risks and can cause life-long health concerns.



## Who is at Risk?

Pregnant individuals can develop heart disease during pregnancy or after delivery.

You may be at higher risk if you:

- ▶ Have a history of high blood pressure, preeclampsia, heart disease, diabetes or gestational diabetes
- ▶ Are over 40 years of age
- ▶ Are obese
- ▶ Are Black, American Indian, Alaska Native
- ▶ Have a family history of heart disease or preeclampsia
- ▶ Have a pregnancy with more than one baby
- ▶ Have had a premature birth
- ▶ Have limited access to healthy meals, lack exercise or sleep poorly
- ▶ Live in an area with limited access to prenatal care or in a low-income community
- ▶ Use tobacco, marijuana, alcohol or illicit drugs
- ▶ Have a history of radiation or chemotherapy, kidney disease or an autoimmune disease



## Warning Signs:

Heart disease symptoms may occur during pregnancy or up to one year after delivery. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your healthcare provider right away.

- ▶ Trouble breathing (especially with minimal activity)
- ▶ Chest pain, or fast or abnormal heartbeat
- ▶ Extreme swelling, especially in the legs, or unusual weight gain
- ▶ Dizziness or fainting
- ▶ Overwhelming tiredness
- ▶ A cough that doesn't go away



## What You Should Do:

If you experience any symptoms of heart disease:

- ▶ Trust your instincts and let your healthcare provider know
- ▶ Let every healthcare provider you see know that you were pregnant within the last 12 months
- ▶ Get a second opinion if you feel you are not being heard

## Ways to Lower Your Risk of Heart Disease:

### Before Pregnancy

- ▶ Be your healthiest self. Visit your healthcare providers and review your:
  - Blood pressure
  - Cholesterol levels
  - Blood sugar levels
  - Medical history including past pregnancy complications and family history
  - Medications to ensure they are safe for pregnancy
- ▶ Keep a healthy weight, exercise regularly, eat healthy foods and take prenatal vitamins.
- ▶ Do not smoke or do drugs and limit drinking alcohol.
- ▶ Prioritize sleep, mental wellness and self-care.



## Ways to Lower Your Risk of Heart Disease (continued):

### During Pregnancy

- ▶ Go to your prenatal care visits. Your healthcare provider should monitor:
  - Your blood pressure
  - Symptoms you may be experiencing
  - Your baby’s growth and heartbeat
- ▶ Bring a support person to your healthcare provider appointments.
- ▶ Keep a healthy weight, exercise regularly, [eat healthy foods](#) and take prenatal vitamins.
- ▶ If your doctor asks that you monitor your blood pressure at home, do it regularly and keep a record of your blood pressures to bring to your medical appointments.
- ▶ Call your healthcare provider immediately if you have headaches, blurry vision, changes to your blood pressure or overall do not feel well.
- ▶ Consider breastfeeding. Consult with your healthcare provider first.



### After Pregnancy

- ▶ It is important to go to your postpartum visits to continue monitoring your health.
- ▶ If you had high blood pressure or heart disease during pregnancy, continue monitoring your blood pressure closely for the first 10 days after delivery.
- ▶ Tell any healthcare provider you visit about your recent pregnancy and any issues you may have had within the last 12 months.
- ▶ If you have heart disease or take heart medication, consult with your health care provider before breastfeeding your baby.
- ▶ Eat a [healthy diet](#) and exercise regularly as advised.
- ▶ Monitor your heart condition and risk factors every year.



Visit the [Pregnancy-related Heart Disease webpage](#) for more resources and information.



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