

Getting Pregnant

## 5 Signs of Preeclampsia That Pregnant Women Often Overlook



by **Judy Koutsky**  
Updated: July 15, 2015



As many as one in 10 women will be diagnosed with [preeclampsia](#) during pregnancy, a condition characterized by pregnancy-induced [high blood pressure](#) which, if left untreated, can have serious consequences for mom and baby. Fortunately, if it's caught early and treated promptly, women near term have virtually the same excellent chance of having a positive pregnancy outcome as those with normal blood pressure. But according to [Dr. Eduardo Raez](#), an obstetrician at the Institute for Women's Health in San Antonio, Texas, the symptoms of this condition are sometimes overlooked by women, because it's more common in a woman's first pregnancy — when she has nothing to compare it to. "It's not easy to predict who gets preeclampsia," notes Dr. Raez. What's more, many signs of preeclampsia are similar to normal symptoms of pregnancy. However there are a few ways to tell warning signs apart; here are a few Dr. Raez says moms-to-be sometimes overlook:

- **Headaches.** Many women to experience more [headaches than usual during pregnancy](#), likely due to tension, fatigue and pregnancy hormones (which can also clog up your sinuses and make you more susceptible to allergies). However you should make sure to tell your doctor if you're experiencing regular headaches that don't respond to pain medications or get worse as your pregnancy goes on, as this can be a symptom of preeclampsia.
- **Abdominal pain.** If you're feeling abdominal or shoulder pain on the *upper right side*, let your doctor know — this is where your liver is located, and pain can sometimes be a sign of preeclampsia. Note that this pain differs from the perfectly normal [abdominal achiness caused by round ligament pain](#), which occurs on one or both sides of your *lower abdomen*.



- **Changes in vision.** It's actually common to have some [vision changes during pregnancy](#), when your sleep is disturbed, your eyes are drier and your vision becomes blurry due to an influx of pregnancy hormones. But if your vision is bothering you and especially if you see flashing lights or spots, are sensitive to light or experience blurred/double vision, be sure to alert your practitioner.
- **Increased swelling.** Those pesky pregnancy hormones make some [edema \(swelling of the feet and ankles\)](#) one of the most common symptoms of pregnancy. However if swelling is sudden and severe in your face and hands and/or if it doesn't go away after 12 hours of rest, call your doctor right away to rule out preeclampsia.
- **Elevated blood pressure.** While preeclampsia is linked with elevated blood pressure during pregnancy, your blood pressure can read high one or more times when you're expecting even if you don't have preeclampsia. Some women experience white-coat hypertension (when blood pressure reads higher once or twice simply due to nerves) or gestational hypertension, which is not the same as preeclampsia. However if you're already on hypertension medications and your blood pressure increases, or if you experience high blood pressure for the first time during pregnancy, it's a sign you shouldn't overlook. Getting your blood pressure checked regularly is just one more reason you shouldn't skip any doctor appointments when you're expecting.

Dr. Raez notes that "most of these symptoms are very common in pregnancy and do not necessarily indicate preeclampsia, so individual evaluation of each patient is necessary to confirm the diagnosis." However, he adds, "We look and ask for these and other symptoms at every prenatal care visit, so we can rule out this condition. That's why it's so very important to keep every appointment, and for the patient to inform the doctor of any complaints she may have."

In his experience, preeclampsia "is similar to an immune illness, with the mother showing an abnormal response to the placenta tissue." The challenging part is that "no absolute cause or preventive measure has been identified," he explains. Even in terms of who it affects, "although it's mostly a disease of young moms, it also happens to older moms," he says.

Dr. Raez advises moms-to-be to aim to become pregnant when they're "in the healthiest state, with an ideal weight." He recommends focusing on [eating a healthy diet](#) and [exercising regularly](#) before and throughout pregnancy. He also stresses the importance of working with a very competent and experienced obstetrician with whom you're comfortable sharing all your worries and symptoms at every visit. Lastly, a point he can't emphasize enough: "It's essential not to miss appointments."

### 3 things to read next:

- [Causes of Preeclampsia](#)
- [How Preeclampsia Is Diagnosed](#)
- [Preventing Preeclampsia](#)



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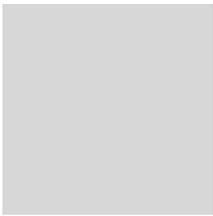
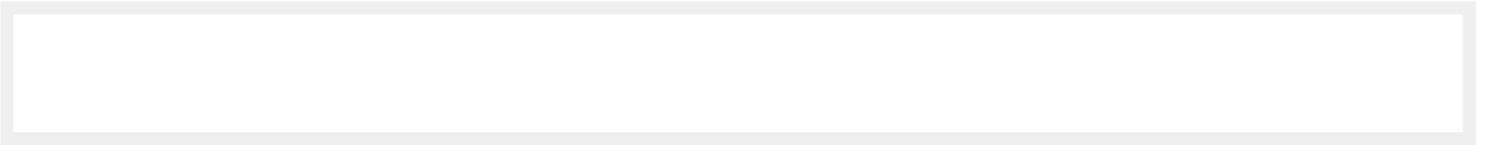
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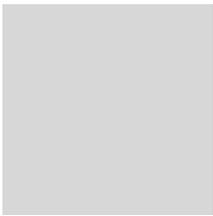
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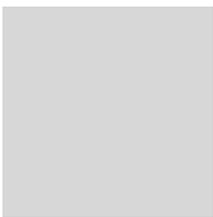
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