

Preeclampsia: Signs and Screening



Preeclampsia is a blood-pressure disorder after 20 weeks — affects 5–8% of pregnancies.



Severe headache, vision changes, and upper-right pain are emergencies, not wait-and-see.



Low-dose aspirin in high-risk pregnancies cuts preeclampsia risk meaningfully.

Signs to know

- ▶ Blood pressure 140/90 or higher.
- ▶ Protein in the urine on prenatal screening.
- ▶ Sudden swelling, especially in the face and hands.
- ▶ Severe headache that doesn't ease with acetaminophen.
- ▶ Visual disturbances — spots, flashing, blurred vision.
- ▶ Upper-right abdominal pain, under the ribs.

Risk factors worth flagging

- ▶ First pregnancy, or a prior pregnancy with preeclampsia.
- ▶ High BMI before pregnancy.
- ▶ Chronic hypertension, pre-existing or gestational diabetes.
- ▶ Age over 35 or under 18.
- ▶ Multiples (twins, triplets).
- ▶ Family history of preeclampsia.

Treatment and management

- ▶ Blood pressure check at every prenatal visit — non-negotiable.
- ▶ Mild preeclampsia: closer monitoring, sometimes induction at 37 weeks.
- ▶ Severe preeclampsia: BP medications and magnesium sulfate to prevent seizures.
- ▶ Delivery is the only definitive treatment. Most cases resolve postpartum.

Gaux Note

If you have risk factors, ask your provider about low-dose aspirin (81 mg) starting in the second trimester. It meaningfully lowers preeclampsia risk in high-risk pregnancies.