

Monitoring BP during pregnancy can avert future risk of heart diseases

New Delhi [India], Oct 31 : As per recent statistics, about 7% to 10% of pregnant women experience pregnancy-induced hypertension (PIH).

This is a condition in which a woman's blood pressure rises way above the normal levels.

Recent research shows that women with high blood pressure during pregnancy stand at a greater risk of developing heart diseases later in life.

Statistics go on to show that women with PIH are 2.2 times more at risk of developing heart diseases after pregnancy when compared to those without hypertension.

PIH is a temporary condition in most women. However, in others it can continue post-delivery as well and left untreated, can lead to preeclampsia. This condition is also common in those who are giving birth for the first time. Women with certain medical conditions and health factors also stand the risk of developing PIH.

Speaking about this, Dr Hrishikesh D Pai, Director IVF & Infertility at Fortis La Femme Hospital, Delhi & Secretary General of the Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecological Societies of India said, "A woman needs to do much more than watching her weight and taking vitamins during pregnancy. There is also a need to carefully monitor vitals especially the blood pressure levels. This is truer of women who have an existing history of high blood pressure, kidney ailments, diabetes, history of preeclampsia during first pregnancy, or those pregnant with multiple fetuses."

Adding, "PIH develops a resistance in the blood vessels, affecting the blood flow throughout the body. This includes the blood flow to the placenta and uterus, which can cause growth problems for the unborn baby. PIH can also lead to premature detachment of the placenta from the uterus and thereby stillbirth. An increased blood pressure means the heart must work harder to pump blood. This, in later life, can cause seizures and heart diseases in such women and in rare cases can also become fatal."

Some characteristics symptoms of PIH include high BP levels in the second and third trimester; protein in urine sample; edema; unusual weight gain not related to pregnancy; blurred or double vision; vomiting and nausea; abdominal pain and discomfort; frequent urination or small amount of urination; abnormal LFT and KFT; blood in urine; increase in heart rate; and fever and buzzing sound in the ears.

Adding further, Dr Nandita Palshetkar, Director, IVF and Infertility at Fortis Bloom IVF Center at La Femme GK 2 and Fortis Hospital Gurgaon, said, "It is imperative to monitor fluctuations in BP during pregnancy since not all of it can be attributed to PIH. Post delivery, the BP levels should be monitored through ABPM (ambulatory blood pressure monitoring) regularly. This method is more accurate in detecting BP fluctuations over a period of time and helps in taking readings on the go. Women with PIH must take adequate bed rest. In case of consistently high readings, hospitalization for constant fetal monitoring might be needed. Many women do not take follow up precautions post-pregnancy, particularly in monitoring BP levels. Women should follow up with their primary care doctors after giving birth as this will help prevent the risk of heart complications later in life."

Some preventive measures that women can take to avoid hypertension during pregnancy are as follows.

- Monitor BP regularly before conception and after delivery. This is especially true for those with a history of hypertension.
- Reduce your salt intake. Use salt sparingly in dishes and season your food with herbs and spices instead. Avoid consuming processed foods and go for fresh fruits and vegetables instead.
- Indulge in regular physical activity even during pregnancy in consultation with your healthcare provider. Losing that extra weight can help avert the risk of acquiring hypertension.
- If you have an existing history of high BP, talk to your doctor about medication use before and during pregnancy. Bring your BP levels under control before conceiving. Your doctor will be able to also advise you on which medications are safe for consumption.
- Never miss a prenatal checkup as it helps in detecting any increase in blood pressure during pregnancy. ABPM can help in monitoring BP at home. You should also avoid smoking and drinking, as they are two of the most important causative agents for high BP.

