




Pregnancy and Heart Health:

A Handbook for
Prevention and
Postpartum Recovery

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Pregnancy is an extraordinary journey filled with excitement, change, and learning.

As your body nurtures new life, your heart and blood vessels work harder to meet the increased demands of pregnancy. This natural process can sometimes lead to challenges, such as high blood pressure or conditions like preeclampsia.

Caring for your heart and arteries is essential for a healthy pregnancy. When your cardiovascular health is strong, it supports your well-being, makes delivery safer, and aids in postpartum recovery. This handbook offers practical advice to help you protect your cardiovascular health through every stage of this incredible journey.

This guide provides actionable steps to protect your heart, such as eating nutritious foods, staying active, managing stress, and keeping track of your blood pressure. You'll also learn to recognize signs of potential issues and know when to seek medical advice. Whether you're planning for a baby, pregnant, or in the postpartum stage, these tips will support you every step of the way.

Your heart health is so important—not just for you but for your baby's future health, too. With the right care and knowledge, you can feel confident and empowered to have a safe and healthy pregnancy. Let's take this journey together!

SECTION 1: PRECONCEPTION CARE

Planning for a baby is an exciting time, but it's also the perfect moment to focus on your health—especially your heart and blood vessels. Taking care of your cardiovascular health before pregnancy not only helps prepare your body for the changes ahead but also reduces the risk of complications for you and your baby. Here's what you can do to give yourself the best start.

Understanding Your Heart and Arteries

Your heart and arteries play a critical role in pregnancy. Your heart pumps more blood to support your baby's growth, and your arteries help carry that blood where it's needed. If your arteries aren't in great shape, it can lead to conditions like high blood pressure or preeclampsia during pregnancy. Checking your blood pressure and learning about your arterial health now can help you avoid problems later.

Why Arterial Health Matters

You may have heard terms like “arterial stiffness” or “vascular health,” but what do they mean? Essentially, your arteries should be flexible enough to adjust to changes in blood flow. If they're too stiff, it can put extra pressure on your heart and increase the risk of complications. Tools like the CONNEQT Pulse can help you track your arterial health and give you insights to improve it before pregnancy.



Know Your Numbers

Before getting pregnant, schedule a checkup to understand your baseline health. Key things to discuss with your doctor include:

- **Blood Pressure:** Make sure it's in the healthy range.
- **Cholesterol Levels:** High cholesterol can affect your heart health.
- **Weight:** Maintaining a healthy weight reduces strain on your heart and arteries.

If you have a condition like high blood pressure or diabetes, work with your doctor to manage it. These conditions can increase the risk of complications during pregnancy, but with the right care, you can still have a healthy journey.

Start Strong for a Healthy Pregnancy

Taking these steps now can make a huge difference when you're pregnant. A strong heart and healthy arteries set the foundation for a smoother pregnancy, an easier recovery, and a lifetime of better health for you and your baby. Remember, it's never too early to start taking care of your heart—it's the best gift you can give to yourself and your growing family.



SECTION 2: PREGNANCY

Pregnancy is a time of incredible change—not just for you, but for your heart and blood vessels too. Your body is working harder than ever to support your growing baby, and that means your cardiovascular system is taking on new challenges. By understanding these changes and taking proactive steps, you can help ensure a healthy pregnancy for both you and your baby.

What Happens to Your Heart and Arteries During Pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your heart and blood vessels adapt to meet your baby's needs. Here are some key changes you might not notice but are happening behind the scenes:

- **Increased Blood Volume:** Your body produces up to 50% more blood to nourish your baby.
- **Higher Heart Rate:** Your heart beats faster to pump that extra blood.
- **Artery Adjustments:** Your arteries expand and become more elastic to handle the increased blood flow.

While these changes are normal, they can sometimes cause or reveal issues like high blood pressure or vascular stress, which is why monitoring your heart health is so important during this time.

The Role of Arterial Health

Your arteries play a key role in pregnancy, helping deliver oxygen and nutrients to your baby. If your arteries are stiff or not functioning well, it can lead to complications like reduced blood flow to the placenta. Tools like pulse wave analysis, available through devices like the CONNEQT Pulse, can give you insights into your arterial health and help you take action if needed.

Simple Steps to Support Your Heart During Pregnancy

Taking care of your cardiovascular health during pregnancy is easier than you might think. Here are some practical tips:

1. Eat for Heart and Baby Health:

- Fill your plate with fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
- Include foods rich in omega-3s (like salmon and walnuts) to support your heart.
- Stay hydrated but limit caffeine and sugary drinks.

2. Stay Active: Light to moderate exercise, like walking, swimming, or prenatal yoga, can improve circulation and keep your heart strong. Always check with your doctor before starting or continuing any fitness routine.

3. Manage Stress and Get Enough Rest:

- Pregnancy can be stressful, but managing your stress is important for your heart. Techniques like deep breathing, mindfulness, or simply taking time for yourself can help.
- Prioritize sleep—your body needs it to recharge and repair.

4. Monitor Your Blood Pressure: Regular blood pressure checks are a simple but effective way to ensure your heart and arteries are handling the extra workload of pregnancy. Consider home monitoring tools to stay on top of your numbers.



When to Call Your Doctor

While most pregnancies progress smoothly, it's important to recognize when something might be wrong. Contact your healthcare provider if you experience:

- Severe or persistent headaches.
- Swelling in your face, hands, or feet that comes on suddenly.
- Blurred vision or seeing spots.
- Severe abdominal pain.

Recognizing Risks: Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy

Some women develop high blood pressure during pregnancy, which can lead to conditions including:

Gestational Hypertension: High blood pressure that develops after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

Preeclampsia: A more serious condition involving high blood pressure and potential organ damage. It often comes with symptoms like severe headaches, swelling, or changes in vision.

By staying on top of your blood pressure and discussing any unusual symptoms with your healthcare provider, you can catch and manage these conditions early.



SECTION 3: **POSTPARTUM PERIOD**

The postpartum period is a time of healing, adjustment, and growth—not just for your new baby but for you, too.

After pregnancy and delivery, your heart and blood vessels begin to recover from the extra demands they've faced over the past nine months. This period is crucial for restoring your cardiovascular health and setting the foundation for your long-term wellness.

Prioritizing Yourself

As a new mom, it's easy to put your baby's needs first, but taking care of yourself is just as important. When you prioritize your health, you're also ensuring you'll be there for your family for years to come. Whether it's asking for help, finding time for self-care, or staying on top of your health checkups, small steps can make a big difference.

The postpartum period is just the beginning of your journey as a mother. By taking steps to support your heart and vascular health now, you're investing in a healthier future—for yourself and your growing family.

What Happens to Your Heart After Pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your heart and arteries worked overtime to support your baby. After delivery, they begin to return to their pre-pregnancy state, but this recovery doesn't happen overnight. Some changes you may experience include:

- **Blood Volume Returning to Normal:** The extra blood your body produced during pregnancy gradually decreases over the first few weeks.
- **Heart Rate and Blood Pressure Stabilizing:** Your heart rate and blood pressure may take time to settle, especially if you experienced conditions like preeclampsia or gestational hypertension.

While these changes are natural, they can sometimes leave you feeling tired or overwhelmed. Giving your body time and care to recover is essential.

Recognizing Postpartum Complications

The postpartum period can come with risks to your cardiovascular health. Be aware of these warning signs and contact your doctor if you experience:

- **High Blood Pressure:** If your numbers remain high or increase, it could signal a condition like postpartum preeclampsia.
- **Shortness of Breath or Chest Pain:** These could indicate heart or lung issues that need immediate attention.
- **Swelling or Pain in One Leg:** This could be a sign of a blood clot (deep vein thrombosis).
- **Severe Fatigue or Dizziness:** While some tiredness is normal, extreme symptoms may indicate anemia or other concerns.

Recovering Your Cardiovascular Health

Here are steps you can take to support your heart as you recover from pregnancy:

1. Nourish Your Body:

- Focus on whole foods rich in nutrients like fiber, healthy fats, and antioxidants.
- Iron-rich foods (like spinach, beans, and lean meats) can help replenish your blood supply.
- Stay hydrated, especially if you're breastfeeding, to support overall circulation and health.



2. Ease Back Into Activity:

- Gentle movement, like walking or postpartum yoga, can help improve circulation and strengthen your heart. Avoid strenuous exercise until your doctor gives the go-ahead.
- Pelvic floor exercises (like Kegels) can also support overall recovery

3. Manage Stress and Sleep:

- Sleep may feel impossible with a newborn, but even short naps can help your body recover.
- Practice stress-reducing techniques like deep breathing, journaling, or asking for help when you need it.

4. Keep Monitoring Your Health:

- If you experienced high blood pressure or preeclampsia during pregnancy, follow up with your doctor for regular checkups.
- Home blood pressure monitors or devices like the CONNEQT Pulse can help you track your progress.

Long-Term Heart Health After Pregnancy

Caring for your heart doesn't stop after the postpartum period. Pregnancy can sometimes reveal or increase your risk for future cardiovascular conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or stroke. Here's how you can reduce those risks:

- **Stay Active:** Make regular exercise a part of your routine.
- **Eat a Balanced Diet:** Focus on heart-healthy foods that support vascular health.
- **Schedule Regular Checkups:** Discuss your cardiovascular health with your doctor during annual visits.



SECTION 4: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Navigating heart and vascular health during pregnancy and postpartum can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to do it alone. With the right tools, resources, and support, you can stay on top of your cardiovascular health and make informed decisions at every stage. This section highlights practical tools and expert-backed resources to empower you throughout your journey.

Heart Health Monitoring Tools

Keeping track of your heart and arterial health is one of the best ways to stay proactive. Here are some tools that can help:

- 1. Blood Pressure Monitors:** Home blood pressure monitors are affordable and easy to use, making it simple to track your numbers regularly. Look for devices on the Validated BP list.
- 2. Wearable Technology:** Fitness trackers and smartwatches with heart rate monitoring can help you stay active and identify trends in your heart health.
- 3. Health Journals or Apps:** Keep a journal or use an app to log your blood pressure, symptoms, and activities. This can help you and your doctor spot patterns and address concerns quickly.

CONNQ T Pulse: This innovative device goes beyond traditional blood pressure monitoring by providing insights into your arterial health. It measures central blood pressure and arterial stiffness, helping you understand how your heart and blood vessels are performing during pregnancy and postpartum.



Educational Resources

Knowledge is power, and there are many trusted sources to help you understand and manage your cardiovascular health:

- **American Heart Association (AHA):** Offers a wealth of information about heart health during pregnancy.
- **Preeclampsia Foundation:** Provides resources for understanding and managing hypertensive disorders of pregnancy.
- **National Institutes of Health (NIH):** Features research-backed articles on maternal and cardiovascular health.

When to Seek Professional Guidance

While tools and resources are helpful, nothing replaces personalized care from healthcare professionals. Here's when to reach out for support:

1. **Obstetricians and Midwives:** Regular prenatal and postpartum checkups are essential for monitoring your heart and overall health.
2. **Cardiologists:** If you have a history of heart conditions or develop high blood pressure during pregnancy, a cardiologist can help manage your care.
3. **Maternal-Fetal Medicine Specialists:** These experts focus on high-risk pregnancies and can provide specialized guidance if you're experiencing complications.
4. **Registered Dietitians:** For personalized nutrition advice, a dietitian can help you develop a heart-healthy eating plan.



Support Networks

Pregnancy and motherhood can be emotionally challenging, and having a support system can make all the difference. Consider these options:

- **Local Mom Groups:** Connect with other moms to share experiences and advice.
- **Postpartum Support Groups:** Join groups that focus on recovery and self-care.
- **Telehealth Services:** Many providers now offer virtual consultations, making it easier to access care from home.

Your Heart Health Checklist

Here's a quick summary of tools and resources to keep you on track:

- Invest in a reliable blood pressure monitor or consider a device like CONNEQT Pulse.
- Use educational resources to stay informed about heart health during pregnancy and postpartum.
- Schedule regular checkups and follow your doctor's advice.
- Lean on support networks and professional guidance when needed.

With these tools and resources, you'll be well-equipped to take charge of your cardiovascular health. Remember, staying proactive about your heart health isn't just good for you—it's a gift to your growing family.

Your Heart, Your Journey

Your journey to motherhood is one of the most significant chapters of your life, filled with moments of anticipation, joy, and growth. Along the way, your heart and blood vessels play a vital role in supporting both you and your baby. By taking proactive steps to care for your cardiovascular health, you're not only improving your pregnancy experience but also laying the foundation for a healthier future for you and your family.

This guide has walked you through each stage of the motherhood journey—preconception, pregnancy, and postpartum—offering insights and practical tips to keep your heart and arteries in top shape. From eating nutritious foods and staying active to monitoring your health with tools like CONNEQT Pulse, these small but meaningful actions can make a big difference in your well-being.

Remember, you don't have to do this alone. Lean on your healthcare team, support networks, and trusted resources to navigate the challenges and celebrate the milestones. Whether it's a routine checkup, a moment to rest, or seeking help when something feels off, every step you take to prioritize your health is a step toward a safer, stronger, and more vibrant life for you and your baby.

Your health is a gift—not just to yourself but to your growing family. With knowledge, support, and care, you're empowered to take control of your heart health and embrace the journey ahead with confidence and peace of mind. Here's to a healthy heart, a healthy pregnancy, and a beautiful beginning for you and your little one.





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