

American Society of Hematology How Healthy Blood Is Important for a Healthy Pregnancy

Like other parts of your body, your blood goes through changes when you are pregnant. These changes can cause certain blood disorders, such as blood clots or anemia, to develop or can worsen an existing blood condition you may have. Knowing about your risks and discussing them with your doctor can help to ensure a healthy pregnancy.

What Should I Know About Anemia?

When you become pregnant, the amount of blood in your body increases by about 20-30 percent, which means you have an increased need for iron and vitamins that the body needs to make blood cells. Many women lack a sufficient amount of iron needed for the second and third trimesters; it's during this time you need the nutrients so your baby can make most of its blood. When your body doesn't have enough iron, you can become anemic. Although mild anemia is common during pregnancy, significant anemia during the first two trimesters carries a greater risk for a pre-term delivery or low-birth-weight baby. More severe anemia can also put your baby at higher risk for anemia later in infancy.

Good nutrition is the best way to prevent anemia if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant. Eating foods high in iron content (such as dark green leafy vegetables, red meat, fortified cereals, eggs, and peanuts) can help ensure that you get enough iron. Vitamins are another way you can make sure to get enough vitamin B12 and folic acid. Talk to your doctor about ways you can prevent anemia during pregnancy.

If you experience any symptoms of anemia, bring them to the attention of your doctor. Common symptoms include:

- Weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Pallor (paleness of the skin)
- Dizziness
- Coldness in your hands and/or feet
- Chest pain
- Headache
- Pounding or "whooshing" in your ears

What Should I Know About Blood Clots?

When you become pregnant, your blood naturally has a tendency to clot more easily. This change in the blood, although thought to prevent excess bleeding during delivery, can also increase your risk of developing a dangerous blood clot that blocks the flow of blood to major organs. Women who are obese, on bed rest, or have a family history of clotting disorders are at greater risk. If you have had a previous pregnancy complication, such as a miscarriage or stillborn birth, your doctor may test you for a clotting disorder.

Be familiar with the symptoms of a blood clot, and notify your doctor immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Pain and tenderness in the limbs
- Swelling
- Increased warmth over the skin localized to arm(s) or leg(s)

If you do have a blood clot, your doctor may prescribe an anticoagulant, or medicine that prevents the blood from clotting. Pregnant women are administered an anticoagulant that does not cross the placenta and will not harm the baby.

Remember to share your medical history with your doctor. It is important that your doctor be informed about any previous conditions you may have had so that you can be monitored properly, and the best course of action can be determined.

How Do I Learn More?

For more information about anemia and blood clots during pregnancy, visit <http://www.bloodthevitalconnection.org/for-patients/womens-health/Default.aspx>