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Early Onset Pre-Eclampsia Screening

Protecting the health of both yourself and your baby

Did you know...

- Pre-eclampsia is more common than you may think, affecting approximately 1 in 20 pregnancies, compared to Down syndrome, which occurs in about 1 in 700 births
- Early screening for pre-eclampsia is the best way to find out if pre-eclampsia may affect your pregnancy
- Once the risk of pre-eclampsia has been identified, aspirin can prove an effective treatment [2]

What is pre-eclampsia?

Pre-eclampsia is a potentially dangerous pregnancy complication characterised by high blood pressure and protein in the urine and affects approximately 1 in every 20 pregnancies [1]. Although many cases are mild, the condition can lead to serious complications for both you and your baby if it's not monitored and treated correctly.

In some cases, pre-eclampsia can become serious and affect other parts of your body such as your liver and blood clotting system (HELLP syndrome), and can also lead to convulsions (eclampsia).

Also, when pre-eclampsia develops, not enough blood flows from the placenta to your baby, which affects the amount of nutrients and oxygen your unborn baby receives. These factors can affect your baby's normal growth and development. When pre-eclampsia occurs early in pregnancy (before 37 weeks), the risk of premature delivery and the health problems associated with premature delivery increase, including breathing, heart, immune system, blood and gastrointestinal problems.

Pre-eclampsia can develop in any pregnancy, regardless of maternal age, family history or personal health. If identified in time, pre-eclampsia can be monitored and treated effectively [2].

Why should I have pre-eclampsia screening?

Early onset pre-eclampsia screening will tell you if you are at risk of developing pre-eclampsia. The earlier you know, the sooner preventative treatment can be started.

All pregnant women should be offered early onset pre-eclampsia screening, as it is suitable for pregnant women of any age or risk category. Naturally conceived or IVF singleton or twin pregnancies, including those with egg donors, are all suitable for testing.

How does pre-eclampsia screening work?

Clinical Labs early onset pre-eclampsia screening involves a simple blood test that measures the amount of placental growth factor in your bloodstream. Placental growth factor is a marker for early onset pre-eclampsia in pregnancy. You will also be asked some basic questions about your medical history and pregnancy.

When should I have the test?

You should be screened for early onset pre-eclampsia in the first trimester of pregnancy, when you are at least 11 weeks pregnant and less than 14 weeks pregnant. In order to be effective, treatment needs to be started before 16 weeks of pregnancy, which is why early screening is important.

If you are also having the first trimester maternal serum screening test, the same blood sample can be used for both tests.

How long will it take for results?

Results will be available 48 hours after receipt of sample.

What treatment will my doctor recommend?

A low dose of bedtime aspirin, under the direct care of your doctor, has been shown to be effective in reducing the rate of pre-eclampsia [2]. To get the best results, this treatment must be started before 16 weeks of pregnancy [3,4], which is why early screening is important.

Am I at risk of developing pre-eclampsia?

Pre-eclampsia can affect any pregnancy, but some women are more at risk.

Risk factors:

- This is your first pregnancy, or even the first pregnancy with your present partner
- You, your mother or sister have had pre-eclampsia
- You have a BMI (body mass index) of 35 or more
- Your age is 40 or over
- You are expecting twins, triplets or quadruplets
- You suffer from high blood pressure, kidney problems and/or diabetes
- Your pregnancy was medically assisted by IVF

How much does the test cost?

Currently, neither Medicare nor private health insurance cover the cost of pre-eclampsia screening.

The Clinical Labs early onset pre-eclampsia screening test costs $50.

Where can I have the test?

You can visit any one of our 1,300 collection centres located around Australia. To find your local Clinical Labs collection centre, visit clinicallabs.com.au/location

References

1. Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists patient information leaflet, Information for you: Pre-eclampsia. RCOG Patient Information Committee, London, UK, Aug 2012.
2. Rolnik DL et al. (2017). Nicolaides KH. ASPRE trial: performance of screening for preterm pre-eclampsia. Ultrasound Obstet Gynecol Jul 25.
3. Bujold et al. (2010). Prevention of preeclampsia and intrauterine growth restriction with aspirin started in early pregnancy: a meta-analysis. Obstet Gynecol. 2010;116:402-14.
4. Roberge et al. (2012). Early administration of low-dose aspirin for the prevention of preterm and term preeclampsia: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Fetal Diagn Ther. 2012;31(3):141-6. doi: 10.1159/000336662. Epub 2012 Mar 21.

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