

[Preeclampsia expert: Education saves lives](#)

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Risk factors for preeclampsia include preexisting high blood pressure, kidney disease, autoimmune diseases and pregnancies with multiple babies. Preeclampsia also is most likely to strike both younger women in their first pregnancies and older women. (Photo from ThinkStock)

It can happen to anyone. It doesn't discriminate. And there's no way to stop it ? at least not yet.

Preeclampsia, or extreme high blood pressure caused by pregnancy, remains one of the world's foremost causes of maternal and infant death. There's a renewed push to educate women and healthcare workers alike, coming on the heels of the International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy World Congress

hosted recently by Tulane University School of Medicine and [Dr. Gabriella Pridjian](#), professor and chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

“Since delivery is the cure for preeclampsia, women are followed very closely to decide when to deliver,” said Pridjian. “If you deliver too early, the baby is at risk. If you wait too long, the mother dies.”

While the most severe cases of preeclampsia are typically caught and treated in the United States during routine prenatal care, the mysterious condition still claims lives in many less developed countries.

“The initial goal is to educate the educators in those countries,” Pridjian said, adding that the congress is also impressing upon local governments the importance of access to medical care.

Preeclampsia is typically diagnosed in the latter half of pregnancy; experts say research suggests a woman is predestined to get preeclampsia very early in the pregnancy. Several centers, including Tulane, are studying specialized placental trophoblast cells, which could give clues to placental implantation abnormalities and the development of preeclampsia.

“The cure for preeclampsia isn't really the delivery of the baby, it's delivery of the placenta,” she said. “But you can't deliver the placenta without delivering the baby.”

Symptoms include severe headaches and blurred vision, excessive swelling, rapid weight gain from water retention and, in severe cases, seizures. Risks to the baby include low birth weight and complications from premature birth.

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