

High Risk Pregnancy Detection and Management: Need of Present Day Obstetric Care

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High-risk pregnancy is a term to describe a situation in which a mother and her fetus, or both are at higher risk for problems during pregnancy or delivery compared to normal pregnancy. A pregnancy is high risk when it involves chronic health problems in the mother, such as diabetes or hypertension, maternal infections, complications from a previous pregnancy, or any other issues that might arise during pregnancy.¹

There are several factors that makes a pregnancy a high risk pregnancy, which includes existing health conditions, the maternal age, lifestyle, and health issues that existed before or during pregnancy.² Existing health conditions like: Uncontrolled high blood pressure, can damage multiple organs in the mother and increase the risk for low birth weight, intrauterine growth restriction, preeclampsia and Eclampsia.³ Gestational Diabetes mellitus is a significant risk factor for mother and the fetus as it predisposes the lady to recurrent infection and may be a cause for fetal macrosomia, sudden intrauterine fetal death.⁴ Maternal autoimmune diseases such as lupus and multiple sclerosis can increase maternal and fetal morbidity and mortality. Women with lupus are at increased risk for preterm birth and stillbirth.⁵ Hypothyroidism as well as hyperthyroidism, can lead to missed abortions, preterm labor, cretinism as well as maternal heart failure and poor weight gain, and brain development problems.⁶ Obesity and underweight both are risk factors for abnormal labor progression as well as macrosomia and small for gestational age fetus.⁷ Infections like HIV, hepatitis B, Syphilis can be transmitted to the fetus during pregnancy, labor and delivery, and breastfeeding. Hence it needs to be detected during pregnancy and measures to prevent transmission to the unborn should be addressed.^{8,9} Anemia in the mother can lead to small for gestation fetuses, cardiac failure in mother. Age more than 35 years and young mothers of less 18 years are at high risk for conditions like preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, preterm labor, increased chances of operative deliveries like cesarean section.¹⁰⁻¹² Substance and drug abuse by the mother increases the risk of preterm deliveries, mentally challenged babies and many more adverse conditions in the fetus.¹³⁻¹⁵

Prevention of high risk pregnancy may not be possible in all the situation but with good pre-pregnancy care and counselling, it can be controlled and prevented.¹⁰ Regular antenatal visits during pregnancy and early detection of the morbidities can definitely improve the maternal and fetal condition.¹⁶ Treatment for high-risk pregnancy depends on the woman's specific health issues. A woman whose pregnancy is complicated due to thyroid disorders can be controlled with appropriate thyroid hormones.¹⁷ Women with substance and drug abuse can be counselled and can help her to quit smoking. A woman who is HIV positive would require antiretroviral treatments during pregnancy, labor and post-delivery, and additional medications for her baby after birth.

In Nepal, we are seeing many pregnant ladies with chronic health issues in present time compared to last decade. We need to address these issues to provide good maternal and fetal care. We need to train more obstetricians in high risk pregnancy and also develop centers to provide high risk antenatal, postnatal and neonatal care. This is the time to think and work for developing health care providers, to develop protocols and centers for high risk pregnancy, before it gets late.

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