

INDIE BIRTH

DIY Prenatal Skills Mini-Course

“How-To” Manual

Taking an Accurate Blood Pressure

Equipment –

1. a reliable blood pressure monitor. Margo at Indie Birth recommends the Microlife 3BTO-A(2) since it is approved for clinical use, is the only monitor that is validated for use in pregnancy and pre-eclampsia by the British Hypertension Society and is similar in price to non-validated and non-clinical models. We don't make any money off of this recommendation.
2. Be SURE you have the correct cuff size for your arm. The size in inches should be marked on the cuff. Measure the center of your upper arm to be sure the cuff will fit, and double check by putting the cuff on and making sure the cuffs index line falls between the "acceptable" range. This looks different on different cuffs, but all of them have these markings.

Set Up –

1. You need a chair with back support, where you can rest your feet flat on the floor, and a surface that allows your arm to rest at heart level (center of the upper arm in line with the heart).
2. Avoid eating, drinking, and smoking for 30 minutes prior to the reading.
3. Use the restroom before sitting down to take the reading.
4. Make sure you won't be interrupted for about 10 minutes while you take your reading(s).

Taking your blood pressure –

1. Put the correctly sized cuff on as noted in your machines instructions. The artery line should line up between your ring and pinky finger with your palm facing up (over the brachial artery). The cuff should be 1-2 cm above the crease of the elbow. Consult your machines instructions about proper placement when in doubt.
2. If your machine is able to do either single or multiple readings, choose which one you are going to do and make sure the correct setting is chosen. Many experts recommend taking multiple readings that are then averaged which may more accurately reflect the true blood pressure. There are studies on this as well. With the recommended Microlife machine you can take 3 readings that are then averaged, but you can also see what each of the 3 individual readings were if that is something you want to record or are interested in. What is most important is that your method stays consistent.
3. Sit and rest quietly for 5 minutes, resting with your back supported and feet flat on the floor. This could mean reading a book, browsing the internet, or just breathing.
4. After you've rested, you can press the start button on your machine. Stay relaxed and still during the reading(s).
5. Your monitor will show you the result and record the reading in its history, and it is a good idea to immediately write it down in your records along with any accompanying notes. The machine's history can get hard to use for comparison purposes, especially if you are taking multiple or frequent readings or have multiple people using the machine.

Taking Your Pulse

Equipment

1. A watch that counts seconds

Taking Your Pulse

1. Find a quiet place to sit
2. Find your pulse. The two easiest spots to use are your radial pulse at the wrist and the carotid pulse on your neck. Use the pads of your index and middle finger and gently feel around until you find it.
 - a. Your radial pulse is on the inside of your wrist, towards your thumb and right below the base of the thumb.
 - b. Your carotid pulse can be felt on the underside of your chin, on the outside of your throat area.
3. Once you find your pulse, get your watch. Count your pulse for 30 full second and double to get your heart's beats per minute, or just count for a full minute.

*Alternatively, if you are also taking your blood pressure with an automatic machine, the machine will give you a pulse reading at the same time.



How to Use a Urine Stick

Equipment:

1. You will need a cup (if you choose)
2. A urine strip from a bottle that is not expired
3. A piece of toilet paper.
4. You will also need to view the completed stick in decent lighting to accurately read it.

How to perform a urine stick reading:

1. Remove a stick from container without touching the squares. Close cap tightly.
2. Pee into the cup using clean catch technique or not depending on your preference
 - a. For a clean catch – wash your hands, spread labia apart, wipe each side of the labia with a baby wipe and then wipe with a new wipe down the center. Then start to pee and once the stream is established, pee into the cup until you have enough and then finish peeing into the toilet.
3. You will dip the stick into the urine by sort of bending it and making sure to get urine on all of the squares. If you prefer, you can pee directly onto the stick; try your best to hit all 10 squares!
4. Quickly lay the stick horizontally on a piece of toilet paper to allow the excess urine to drip down off the stick without contaminating from square to square.
5. Wait the required amount of time (at least a minute) to read the stick in bright lighting. Hold the stick up horizontally to the control panel on the container and match the colors.
6. Record your results

Additional information can be gleaned from observing and smelling the urine when it is in a cup. You can observe the urine for clarity (or lack of), color and also smell. Observing for color and clarity is best done with the urine in a clear container or glass and in good lighting.

Weighing Yourself in Pregnancy

If you are going to weigh yourself, be sure to use the same scale each time and record your results. Weighing yourself at a consistent time of day (mornings are popular) and with similar clothing (or when naked) will allow for the most accurate results. Be sure that your scale is calibrated to zero before you begin and on a flat surface.

How to Count Respirations

Counting your own respirations (breaths per minute) is difficult because you are aware of your breathing pattern and can then change it. Someone else can count your respirations for you at a time when you aren't paying attention or are unaware. They will need to be looking at a second hand on a clock or watch. They can watch your chest or belly movements, and each in/out breath counts as one respiration. It is usually easiest to count for 30 seconds and multiply by 2; counting for a full minute may be more accurate, however.

Palpating Your Baby in Pregnancy

No equipment needed!

1. Empty your bladder and lay down flat on your back on a firm but comfortable surface.
2. To begin, just use your hands to feel around on your belly. It is easiest to feel with your fingers held flat and closed together, using the flat bottom to feel for parts. Experiment with different motions, but circular movements can help get a general sense of what is below your fingers. You can use different, sharper ways of feeling when you're trying to pinpoint what you're feeling.
3. Where you will feel (palpate) will very much depend on the size of your uterus and how many weeks pregnant you are. In early pregnancy, begin at your pubic bone and feel for "masses" or firm spots which most likely is your baby and/or placenta. As your uterus grows, you can use your hands to feel baby parts (feet, knees, elbows etc) as well as the butt, back and head.
4. The main idea when palpating is deciding where you feel movement, where you feel solid parts and what side of your body (right or left) you feel more of the baby on.

Palpation is hard to explain in words, and is best learned through practice. Our Indie Birth video has been helpful to many, and can be found here –

<http://www.indiebirth.com/learning-to-feel-your-own-baby-the-indie-birth-diy-guide-to-palpation/>

Another great resource is the Belly Mapping Workbook by Gail Tully.

How to Measure Your Fundal Height Before 20 Weeks

Before or after palpating your baby, you can measure your uterus.

1. Again, begin with an empty bladder and lay down flat on your back on a firm and comfortable surface.
2. First, palpate your pubic bone. This is the lowest most pelvic bone (really a joint) that you can feel from the outside and is usually about at the place where your pubic hair stops. Feel for the top of the hard bone straight down from your belly button and keep your finger on it.
3. With your other hand, find the top of the uterus, or fundus. To do this, palpate your belly/baby, moving up your belly (towards your face) until your uterus stops, and you feel your uterus dip into your body. It may take you a try or two to feel the difference between your uterus and just the space above that.
4. Measure how many fingerbreadths there are between your pubic bone and your fundus, or your belly button and your fundus if it is closer to your belly button. A fingerbreadth is the width of your finger (usually about a centimeter). In other words, how many fingers fit between your fundus and pubic bone, or belly button and fundus.



Walk your fingers up the side of the belly.



Find the top of the uterus (it feels like a hard ball under the skin).



You can feel the top by curving your fingers into the belly.

How to Measure Your Fundal Height After 20 Weeks

Equipment needed: Flexible measuring tape that reads centimeters, your hands, possible another person's set of hands!

Before or after palpating your baby, you can measure your uterus.

1. Empty your bladder and lay down flat on your back on a firm, comfortable surface.
2. First, palpate your pubic bone. This is usually about at the place where your pubic hair stops. Feel for the top of the hard bone straight down from your belly button and keep your finger on it.
3. With your other hand, find the top of the uterus, or fundus. This can be difficult to do with one hand, so someone might help you by keeping their finger on the pubic bone while you use both hands to find the top of your uterus. Palpate your belly/baby, moving up your belly (towards your face) until your uterus stops, and you feel your uterus dip into your body. It may take you a try or two to feel this clearly.
4. When you find the top of your uterus, you will measure with the measuring tape from the pubic bone (put the tape there at "0 centimeters"); stretch the tape all the way to the top of your uterus where it just starts dipping into your body. Measure in centimeters.

How to Find Your Baby's Heartbeat With a Fetoscope

Equipment needed: 22 inch fetoscope, watch with second hand

After palpating your baby, you may be able to figure out where the back of the baby is (this is not really possible until about 28 weeks or so; but from about 17 weeks onward you may be able to hear with fetoscope.)

1. If you can identify where the back of the baby is (and even if you can't!), place the fetoscope's bell (the circular part) on your belly, with the earpieces in your ears, both pointing towards your nose.
2. Use the flat part of the fetoscope (attached to the bell) to stabilize the bell as you listen for the heartbeat. Experiment with how you stabilize this piece to figure out how you hear best. You can press into your belly harder than you may think, just don't hurt yourself!
3. Listen around to all the sounds you may hear. When you find the fetal heartbeat, it will sound like a fast "tick-tick" that is roughly between 100-160 beats per minute.
4. You may have a watch with a second hand handy to count the heartbeat in 6 second increments (take your count and add a "0" to get the beats per minute; for example, if you count 12 beats in 6 seconds, the heart rate would be 120 beats per minute.). You can also count for 30 seconds and double it, or count for a full minute. Record what you find.



Assessing Swelling

Assessing swelling is really something you are best able to do for yourself. Early in pregnancy take time to notice what your feet, ankles, hands and face look like every day. How much of your ankle bones can you normally see? How do the knuckles on your hands usually look? How do your shoes fit? Mild swelling is usually normal, and is actually a good sign of blood volume expansion peaking around 28 weeks and then maintaining until birth. Most women experience some swelling in pregnancy.

Types of swelling.

1. Pitting – Pitting edema is usually talked about as being more severe than non-pitting edema as it occurs. It is swelling that when pushed on, leaves a pit.
2. Non-pitting – this is general swelling that does not pit.

Both types of swelling generally start in the extremities and move inwards towards the body. The most common progression is feet, ankles, hands, the shins and then the face, but noticing what happens in your body is more important.

How to assess swelling

1. To assess swelling to see if it is pitting, use a fingerpad to press gently for 5 seconds and then determine how severe of a “pit” is left behind. There is no standard that guides how to grade pitting edema, which is why it is important for the same person to do the assessment, and you are best able to do that since you can assess anytime (and often if needed).
2. For both pitting and non-pitting edema it can be helpful to write down your assessment to be able to look back on it later. Or even more helpful would be to take pictures of your feet/ankles, hands and face periodically so you have a comparison if you suspect your swelling is getting more severe. It is easy to either over or underestimate how swollen you were in weeks previous, so documenting is a good idea if this is something you are concerned about.
3. When assessing swelling, be sure to check both sides of the body and note any differences.

My Pregnancy Journal

Date: _____ I'm _____ weeks pregnant today.

Recent diet/food choices:

How I am feeling (emotionally, physically, etc.):

Notable dreams I've had recently:

What my baby is feeling/doing lately:

Things I want to know more about:

My blood pressure today was _____. My pulse was _____.

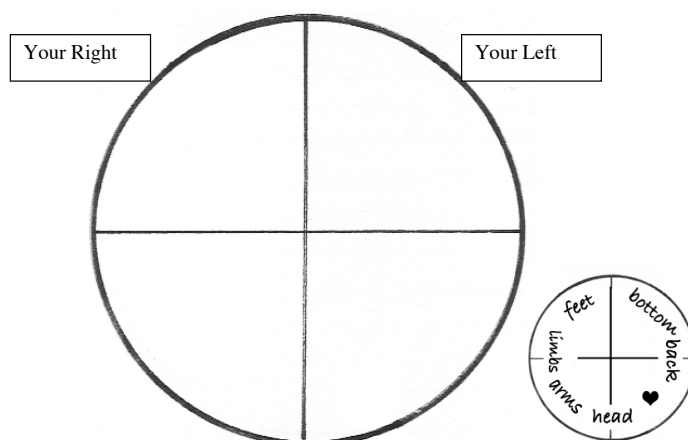
My urine strip reading showed:

Today my baby's heartbeat was _____ beats per minute.

I guessed that my baby weighs _____ right now.

The height of my fundus (top of the uterus) was _____ cm.

(Mark the position of the baby, where you feel kicks, and where you heard the baby's heart beat!)



Other Notes and Ideas: