

Bed Rest During Pregnancy

There you are, cruising along through your pregnancy, and then all of a sudden, your doctor or midwife has put you on bed rest. With all the talk you hear about getting enough exercise, and avoiding excess weight gain in pregnancy, why would you suddenly have to put on the brakes and stay in bed?

There are two primary reasons that your provider would advise bed rest in pregnancy. Either of these problems can appear seemingly out of nowhere, and neither of them is happening because you did anything wrong.

One reason for bed rest is to help in preventing **Preterm Labor**. While bed rest itself isn't a cure, it can go a long way to decreasing your chances of having lots of contractions and causing your cervix to begin to thin and dilate. When you're up and about, especially if you work full time or are managing a busy household, your baby's head can descend low in the uterus to where it may be pushing against the cervix—the opening to the womb. In most cases, this doesn't present a problem for a pregnant woman at all. But sometimes, when the cervix starts out unusually short, or the uterus is abnormally shaped, or it's just too early to have a healthy baby, having lots of preterm contractions isn't in your best interest.

Being in bed, especially tilted on one side or the other, takes the force of gravity out of the picture. The baby's head is no longer putting direct pressure on the cervix, and you are less likely to have as many contractions than when you are active. **Staying well hydrated** and **emptying your bladder frequently** are also very important ways to keep the uterus at rest.

The other reason for bed rest is when your blood pressure has begun to rise, also known as **"Pregnancy Induced Hypertension."** In this instance, bed rest is extremely helpful and very important. Lying down for long periods of time helps to increase the amount of blood circulating through the uterus to and from your baby, as well as to increase the flow to your kidneys. When blood flow is restricted to the baby or to your own kidneys, it can cause growth restriction and stress to your baby, and can make your blood pressure continue to rise. High blood pressure can be very dangerous to both you and your baby, so **it's extremely important to stay in bed and rest when you are asked to**. Just by getting off your feet, you will have gone a long way to controlling your blood pressure. If you are asked to monitor your blood pressure at home, you will notice a significant difference in the readings done with you lying on your side, from readings when you are sitting up or moving around.

For either reason you are asked to go on bed rest, it's important to remember that nutrition and hydration are very important. When on bed rest, you are actually losing muscle mass, minerals, and fluids at a higher rate than you normally would. Even in a healthy person, being on bed rest decreases your cardiovascular fitness significantly. It's easier to get constipated too, so you need to make sure to include lots of fresh fruits, vegetables and fiber to your diet. If you have to be on bed rest for very long, you'll notice that once you're up and about again, you will have a lot less energy and strength, and this will take time to build back up.

Bed rest sounds wonderful when you're busy, but in reality, it's not much fun. It's important to find lots of things to do to pass the time meaningfully. It's easy to start feeling very guilty as you watch others around you having to do the things that were always your responsibility. Letting your family know (and reminding yourself frequently too!) that your most important job right now is to grow the healthiest baby you possibly can, is the thing to focus on. Remember: it's not forever, and you and your baby will be up and about again before you know it.