

# A Comparative Study of Nifedipine versus Labetalol in Hypertensive Crisis During Pregnancy: A Randomized Controlled Study

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**Abstract:** ***Objective:** To compare the efficacy of oral nifedipine with intravenous labetalol in the treatment of severe hypertension in pregnancy. **Materials and Methods:** It was a double - blind, randomized, controlled study conducted in pregnant women with blood pressure of  $\geq 160/110$  mm Hg checked twice 15 mins apart. Total 60 patients were enrolled from April 2023 to September 2023. Patients were randomized to receive Tab Nifedipine (10 mg orally up to five doses) and intravenous placebo saline injection or intravenous labetalol injection in doses of 20, 40, 80, 80, and 80 mg and a placebo tablet every 20 minutes until the target blood pressure of  $\leq 150/100$  mmHg was achieved. The primary outcome of the study was time necessary to achieve target blood pressure. Secondary outcome were number of doses required, onset of labour, mode of delivery, adverse maternal and neonatal effects, side effect, and perinatal outcome. **Results:** The time to achieve the blood pressure goal was significantly shorter with nifedipine (mean  $\pm$  SD, 34.67  $\pm$  20.297 minutes) than with labetalol (52.00  $\pm$  29.054 minutes;  $P < .0001$ ) and remained significantly increased 24 hours after initial administration. No patients required crossover therapy. The adverse effects were infrequent. There were no significant differences in maternal age, gestational age, and blood pressures between the groups. **Conclusion:** Oral Nifedipine and Intravenous Labetalol both are effective in the management of severe hypertension of pregnancy; however, nifedipine controls hypertension more rapidly with less number of doses and was associated with a significant increase in urinary output.*

**Keywords:** Pregnancy, Hypertension treatment, Oral Nifedipine, Intravenous Labetalol, Blood pressure control, Maternal and Neonatal Outcomes

## 1. Introduction

Hypertension affects 10% of pregnancies, many with underlying chronic hypertension, and approximately 1–2% may undergo a hypertensive crisis at some point during their lives. **Hypertensive crisis** includes hypertensive urgency and emergency.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (ACOG) describes a hypertensive emergency in pregnancy as persistent (**lasting 15 min or more**), acute - onset, severe hypertension, defined as systolic BP greater than **160 mmHg** or diastolic BP **110 mmHg** or **MAP  $\geq 125$  mmHg** in the setting of pre - eclampsia or eclampsia.

It is associated with increased risk for Cerebro - vascular Hemorrhage, Pulmonary Edema, Eclampsia, Encephalopathy.

Initial management of hypertensive emergency (systolic BP 160 mmHg or diastolic BP 110 mmHg in the setting of pre - eclampsia or eclampsia) generally includes the rapid reduction of blood pressure through the use of intravenous antihypertensive medications, with goal systolic blood pressure between 140 mmHg and 150 mmHg and diastolic pressure between 90 mmHg and 100 mmHg. First - line intravenous drugs include labetalol and hydralazine, but other agents may be used, including esmolol, nicardipine, nifedipine, and, as a last resort, sodium nitroprusside. Among patients with hypertensive urgency, slower blood pressure reduction can be provided with oral agents.

Hypertension may persist in the postpartum period as a continuation of resolving pregnancy - associated hypertension (gestational, pre - eclampsia, and eclampsia) or chronic hypertension. However, de novo hypertension may present in the postpartum period, stemming from new - onset pre - eclampsia, iatrogenic sources (e. g., intravenous fluid, NSAIDs, and ergonovine), or from secondary causes of hypertension. Its incidence was reported to be between 5.7% - 14%.

The present study was planned to assess the outcome of nifedipine and labetalol on patients with hypertensive crisis during antenatal and immediate post partum period.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This was a, randomized, double - blind clinical study conducted in patients with hypertensive crisis from April 2023 – September 2023 at Raja Rajeshwari medical college, Bangalore. Institutional ethical committee approval was obtained.

### 2.1 Inclusion criteria

Pregnant women of age between 20 to 45 years with  $\geq 34$  weeks of gestation, blood pressure of  $\geq 160/110$  mmHg and with or without proteinuria ( $\geq +1$  or  $\geq 300$  mg in a 24 hours urine collection), were included in this study after informed consent.

### 2.2 Exclusion criteria

Patients with chronic hypertension, asthma, cardiogenic

Volume 13 Issue 6, June 2024

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

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shock, cardiac failure, pulmonary oedema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, bradycardia and exposure to either medication within the preceding 24 hours or absolute contraindication to labetalol and nifedipine were excluded from study.

### 2.3 Sample size calculation and Randomization

Sample size calculation was done on the basis of previous study which reveals, patients received oral nifedipine achieved the target BP in  $25.0 \pm 13.6$  minutes (mean  $\pm$  SD) as compared with  $43.6 \pm 25.4$  minutes (mean  $\pm$  SD) in patients of labetalol group.<sup>6</sup> Using these results as guidance data, with an alpha value of 0.05 and 90% power, the required sample size calculated using Open epi CDC tool was 25 patients in each arm. Assuming the possibility of outcome statistics to be non - parametric, and dropouts of participants, we increased our sample size by 10% for each assumption. The final sample size calculated was 30 participants in each arm.

Participants were randomized on 1: 1 basis. We did block randomization for two treatment arms of the block size 4. The order of treatments within each block was determined by a computer - generated random sequence and placed in numbered sealed envelopes with allocated drugs. Two packages, A and B were made. Package A consist of injection labetalol 60 ml (5mg/ml) and placebo tablets, which were identical to oral nifedipine tablets, or 60ml sodium chloride solution (0.9%) in a syringe and 10 mg nifedipine tablets. Package B contained the opposite regimen; for crossover, if needed. Envelopes were opened by a ward nurse, who was in the research team, and both the gynecologist and patients were blinded. All patients were received magnesium sulfate for seizure prophylaxis. (loading doses of 4g IV and 10g IM, and maintenance dosing of 5g IM/4hr)

Patients were placed in a semirecumbent position on bed. Nurse was instructed to administer 4 ml intravenously from syringe A and one tablet to swallow as the initial treatment. After 20 minutes, (if blood pressure  $>150/100$  mmHg), a second tablet and 8 ml from syringe A was administered. After another 20 minutes, if the target blood pressure was not achieved, a third tablet and 16 ml from syringe A was given. This can be repeated for another two cycles, if required. If after five cycles of regimen A the target blood pressure was not achieved; crossover to regimen B was carried out. Regimen B was carried out in identical fashion to that described for regimen A. If the treatment goal was not achieved after completion of five cycles of regimen B, then open - label treatment was carried out.

All patients were subjected to detailed history and examination. Routine hematological, biochemical and urine test were done. Urine output and vitals were monitored. Fundus examination was done. Cardiotocography and ultrasound scan for fetal well - being was done.

The primary outcome of the study was time required to achieve target blood pressure ( $\leq 150 /100$  mm Hg). Patients were monitored till delivery or 48 hours after control of blood pressure and followed up till 6 weeks after delivery.

Secondary outcome was number of doses required, onset of labour, mode of delivery, adverse maternal and neonatal effects, side effect, and perinatal outcome.

### 3. Results

Total of 60 patients developed hypertensive crisis during our study period which were divided into two groups matched for maternal age, parity and period of gestation. A high systolic BP or diastolic BP alone or both were also comparable among two groups. Age distribution in the study groups, has shown that the mean age of nifedipine group was  $23.42 \pm 4.768$  years and  $22.90 \pm 4.213$  years in labetalol group, ( $p < 0.795$ )

Most of the patients in our study were at mean gestational age of  $37.4 \pm 1.799$  and  $37.7 \pm 2.063$  weeks in nifedipine and labetalol group respectively. ( $p < 0.328$ ) The mean systolic BP was  $182.40 \pm 15.804$  mmHg in nifedipine and  $184.67 \pm 17.462$  mmHg in labetalol group. ( $p < 0.0001$ ) There was no difference noted in the mode of delivery as 5 patient underwent caesarean section and 25 delivered vaginally in each group.

The various side effects of the drugs like nausea, dizziness, palpitations, headache, flushing and fatigue showed no statistical significance among the two drugs. Maternal hypotension or fetal tachycardia was not seen in either of the study groups. The mean birth weight of babies in nifedipine group was  $2.666 (\pm 0.337)$  kg and for the labetalol group was  $2.660 (\pm 0.191)$  kg. The p value was 0.929 which was not statistically significant. The APGAR score of  $< 0.448$

The neonatal complications like prematurity, neonatal ICU admissions, IUGR was comparable among the two groups as no statistically difference was noted. (Table 2)

### 4. Discussion

Hypertension remains the most commonly encountered medical condition in pregnant women. Various etiological theories for the pregnancy induced hypertension has been proposed. The common pathophysiological changes seen are imbalance between vasoconstrictor thromboxane A2 and vasodilator prostacyclin resulting in generalized vasospasm. This leads to endothelial damage resulting in release of vasoactive substances. This causes decreased intravascular volume and increased extravascular volume. The effects of this are placental insufficiency leads to complications. [12]

The main strategy in the management of severe pre - eclampsia is reduction of blood pressure for the prevention of both maternal and fetal adverse events. The recommended drugs for treatment of hypertensive crisis are oral nifedipine, intravenous labetalol and hydralazine. [13] Various randomized control trials has been conducted with the use of these drugs. Nifedipine has been found to have a rapid onset, longer duration of action and the advantage of oral route. [10]

It selectively increases renal perfusion and thereby has a diuretic effect. [14] Intravenous labetalol is a fast - acting antihypertensive with few adverse effects on mother and fetus. [6, 15] It also potentially decreases cerebral perfusion pressure thereby decreasing the incidence of eclampsia. [16] In the present study both nifedipine and labetalol were found to

be effective in the treatment of hypertensive crisis and this is consistent with the reports of the previous studies. [6, 11, 15–17]

In our study, pregnant women allocated to oral nifedipine achieved target blood pressure significantly more rapidly and with fewer doses as compared with those receiving intravenous labetalol. Vermillion et al, [6] demonstrates the mean times needed to achieve target blood pressure was 25 minutes and 43.6 minutes for nifedipine and labetalol group, respectively. We found mean times of  $34.67 \pm 20.297$  and  $52.00 \pm 29.054$  minutes, in nifedipine and labetalol group respectively. ( $p < 0.017$ ).

Although, longer time needed to achieve target BP in the present study might be attributable to a flat dose of nifedipine (10mg) used in our study. A similar effect was also seen in the study by Shekhar et al. [7] although they reported longer times taken to achieve the target BP than our study. However, in the study of Raheem et al [9] reveals, both nifedipine and labetalol to be equally efficacious as median times needed to achieve the target BP was 30 minutes and 45 minutes in the nifedipine and labetalol group, respectively ( $P = 0.59$ ). Shi et al [18] reported that the use of nifedipine and labetalol for severe PIH and found that oral nifedipine was more effective for safely reducing BP to target levels and with lower number of doses compared with intravenous labetalol. Therefore, oral nifedipine can be an alternative to intravenous labetalol for lowering BP during hypertensive emergencies in pregnancy. Oral nifedipine may also be preferable because of its ease of oral administration, low cost and a flat dosing regimen. The network meta - analysis and trial sequential analysis of randomized clinical trials conducted by Shridhran et al [19] also showed similar results.

The number of doses required to control the BP indirectly reflects the time required to reach the desired BP, the probability of persistent severe hypertension and the side effects, all increasing with increasing dose requirements. Our data indicate that we achieved the therapeutic goal blood pressure with less number of doses in nifedipine group as compare to labetalol. The mean dose in nifedipine and labetalol group was  $1.73 \pm 1.015$  and  $2.60 \pm 1.453$  respectively. ( $p > 0.90$ ) metabolized in liver, excreted in urine and has very few side effects. Studies also have demonstrated that nifedipine lowers blood pressure without any reduction in uteroplacental blood flow and abnormal heart rate. [6, 7, 21] Decreased in both urine output and renal perfusion is common in patient of PIH due to intravenous volume depletion. Randomized controlled trials reveals, a significant increase urine output in nifedipine group as compare to patients receiving labetalol. [6, 22] Nifedipine increases urine output after selective renal arteriolar vasodilatation. [6, 23, 24] In our study mean urinary output in 24 hours in nifedipine and labetalol group was  $2296.17 \pm 210.483$  ml and  $1374.00 \pm 155.798$  ml respectively. ( $p < 0.0001$ ). The increase in urine

output was persisted at least 24 hours after initial dose. Nifedipine has been used safely in the treatment of hypertensive emergencies and as a tocolytic agent in several randomized clinical trials. [6, 23, 25]

Our patients achieved the targeted blood pressure after 1 to 2 doses of nifedipine and due to smaller concentration of nifedipine was insufficient to evaluate the tocolytic effect. For seizure prophylaxis magnesium sulphate is commonly used in severe pre - eclampsia [9, 22, 26] Therefore, the possibility of interaction between antihypertensive agents and magnesium sulphate is to be considered. Some cases of severe hypotension, 27 neuromuscular blockade, 28 and symptomatic hypocalcaemia [29] were reported, when nifedipine was used concurrently with magnesium - sulphate in hypertensive pregnancies.

However, various studies suggest that the use of nifedipine and magnesium sulphate together does not increase the risk of serious magnesium - related effects and is well tolerated. [26, 30] We used magnesium sulphate as prophylaxis in all patients of both the groups, none of them had a significant adverse event. In our study no significant adverse effects on maternal or foetal health were reported in both the groups. However, minor side effects, such as nausea, dizziness, headache, cutaneous flushing, and fatigue, were reported which were infrequent, transient, and did not warranted for discontinuation of medication in either groups. None of the randomized studies reported significant maternal side effect. [6–10]

Fetal side effects were rare and occurred with similar frequencies in both groups. The findings were similar in previous studies. [4, 13, 14, 30] Meta - analysis done by S Shekhar [8] shows a significantly reduced risk of maternal side effects with nifedipine. Nifedipine also lowers BP without any apparent reduction in uteroplacental blood flow [12, 14] and without any significant fetal heart rate abnormalities. [6] There were no significant differences in maternal and perinatal outcome, which makes nifedipine an ideal or better than equal alternative to labetalol. All patients responded to antihypertensive agents in our study. Further, there were no cases of overshoot hypotension, cerebrovascular accidents, eclampsia or abruption after initiation of antihypertensive treatment reported. There was no case of maternal mortality.

## 5. Conclusion

Intravenous labetalol and oral nifedipine both are effective in controlling BP. Nifedipine reduced blood pressure more rapidly and had a favourable effect on urine output. No significant maternal and fetal adverse effects were noted with either drug. Oral nifedipine may be a better alternative due to its ease of oral administration and a flat dosing regimen.

**Table 1:** Characteristics of pregnancy in both the groups

Characteristics	Nifedipine	Labetalol	P value
Age in years, (mean $\pm$ SD)	23.43 $\pm$ 4.768	22.90 $\pm$ 4.213	0.648
Parity:			
Primigravida	16 (54.3)	17 (56.7)	0.795
Multigravida	14 (46.70)	13 (43.3)	
Booked /Un-booked			



Booked	9 (30.0)	12 (40.0)	0.417
Un-booked	21(70.0)	18(60.0)	
Gestational age in weeks (mean ±SD)	37.4 ± 1.799	37.7 ± 2.063	0.328
Systolic Blood Pressure (mmHg) (mean ±SD)	182.40 ± 15.804	184.67 ± 17.462	0.600
Diastolic Blood Pressure (mmHg) (mean ±SD)	116.07 ± 8.493	114.87 ± 6.447	0.500
Mean arterial Blood pressure (mean ±SD)	138.178 ± 8.716	146.200 ± 31.813	0.188
Proteinuria	26(86.66)	24(80.00)	0.907

Figure in parentheses denote percentages

**Table 2: Outcomes**

Characteristics	Nifedipine n=30	Labetalol N=30	P value
<b>Primary outcome</b>			
Mean time taken to achieve blood pressure	34.67 +20, 297	52.00 +29, 054	0.017
<b>Secondary Outcomes</b>			
Mean dosages to achieve blood pressure <160/100 mmHg	1.73 I 1, 015	2.60 I 1, 453	0.017
Urine output in 24 hours (ml)	2296.17 + 210, 483	1374.00+ 155, 798	0.0001
<b>Onset of Labour</b>			
Spontaneous	9 (30.0)	9 (30.0)	1, 000
Induced	21 (70.0)	21 (70.0)	1, 000
<b>Mode of delivery</b>			
Caesarean	5 (16.66)	5 (16.66)	1, 000
Vaginal (including instrumental)	25 (83.33)	25 (83.33)	1, 000
Birth weight (kg)	2.9 (2.2 3.1)	2.9 (2.7 3.2)	0.95
<b>Side Effects</b>			
Nausea	6 (20.0)	8 (26.7)	0.542
Dizziness	4 (13.3)	8 (26.7)	0.197
Headache	15 (50.0)	6 (20.0)	0.015
Flushing	3 (10.0)	(13.3)	0.688
Fatigue	00	4 (13.3)	0.038
Hypotension	00	00	-
Shortness of breath	00	00	-
Chest Pain	00	00	-
<b>Perinatal Outcome</b>			
Birth weight (kg)	2.666 +0.337	2.603 +0.191	0.929
<b>APGAR Score (5 minutes)</b>			
<7	3 (10.0)	5 (16.66)	0.448
>7	27 (90.0)	25 (83.33)	
Prematurity	5 (16.66)	3 (10.0)	0.59
IUGR	2 (6.7)	4 (13.3)	0.389
Neonatal intensive care admission	3 (10.0)	5 (16.66)	0.448

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