Gestational Diabetes Before Delivery

What Is Gestational Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that happens when too much sugar is in the blood. There are many kinds of sugars in our bodies. The sugar we talk about most often is glucose. Everyone needs a certain amount of glucose in the blood. However, too much glucose is harmful and can cause many serious problems, such as gestational diabetes, during pregnancy.

Why Did I Get Gestational Diabetes?

Anybody can get gestational diabetes caused by pregnancy hormones that raise the amount of glucose in the blood. Several factors increase the risk of getting gestational diabetes, including:

- Age 25 years or older
- Obesity
- African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander or Native American background
- Prior pregnancy with gestational diabetes or delivering a baby with a birth weight of 9 pounds or more
- Family history of diabetes or gestational diabetes
- Pregnancy with more than one fetus (e.g., twins, triplets or more)
- Inactive lifestyle
- High blood pressure or heart disease
- Polycystic ovarian syndrome

While these are the most common risk factors, you can get gestational diabetes even if you don't have any of the risk factors.

Why Is Gestational Diabetes Important?

Glucose in the mother's blood feeds the fetus (unborn baby). If there is too much glucose, the fetus gets fed too much. High amounts of glucose can cause the fetus to grow too large, resulting in:

- Increased chance of Cesarean delivery (C-section)
- Risk of birth injury during vaginal delivery
- Risk of jaundice in the baby or other complications requiring intensive care

After delivery, the baby stops getting glucose from the mother. Therefore, glucose levels can fall too low. Babies born too large after a gestational diabetes pregnancy have a higher chance of:

- Diabetes during childhood
- Obesity during childhood

These problems can have life-long harmful effects on the child, which are preventable by keeping your blood glucose levels stable during pregnancy.

What Can I Do to Prevent Harm to My Baby or Myself?

Most people with gestational diabetes can keep glucose levels normal with three simple changes:

- Eating right to prevent blood glucose from going too high
- Walking for 10 to 20 minutes after each meal
- Checking blood glucose levels often

Eating Right

Many foods do not raise blood glucose too high. We recommend eating three healthful meals each day, with a healthy snack between meals. Small meals do not increase your glucose as much as large meals. A snack between meals and at bedtime will help you feel full, so you can eat smaller meals.

We want you to continue gaining weight during your pregnancy. Weight loss during pregnancy is ***not*** our goal. Some carbohydrates (starches) are recommended with each meal and snack. It is ***not*** our goal to have you avoid all carbs. Keep a written record of what you eat and when you eat.

Activity After Meals

Walking 10 to 20 minutes after each meal will help blood glucose levels. If you have been told not to walk, arm exercises can be done instead.

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Blood Glucose Monitoring

Checking glucose levels will help you learn which foods work for you and which do not. Check your glucose as soon as you get up each morning (fasting). Check your glucose after each meal (set a timer as a reminder). That's a total of **four checks each day:** fasting and after every meal.

Keep a written record of your blood glucose values/levels. To prevent the fetus from growing too large, it is best if glucose values are:

- Usually less than 95 before breakfast (fasting)
- Generally less than 140 at one hour after meals or less than 120 at two hours after meals

It is OK if you go a little over these numbers occasionally. If you go over by a lot, try to figure out what you ate that made your glucose go high and avoid eating that again. If your glucose level is over 250, call your diabetes prenatal care provider for further advice.

Medication

If your glucose level remains high after eating right and getting the right amount of activity, your provider may prescribe medication to help lower your glucose level.

Will Gestational Diabetes Go Away After Pregnancy?

For most people, gestational diabetes goes away after pregnancy. However, people with gestational diabetes are likely to get it during future pregnancies. Additionally, people with gestational diabetes have a high chance of getting diabetes later in life. Therefore, you should get tested one to three months after pregnancy to see if you have diabetes or prediabetes.

Tell your primary doctor that you have had gestational diabetes and get yearly check-ups.

Healthful Food Choices for Gestational Diabetes

Lean proteins are needed for fetal growth and help you to feel full. Good options include: **Poultry (chicken, turkey) | eggs | fish | Greek yogurt | lean red meats (beef, pork) | nuts and seeds | legumes (beans, lentils, soy products).**

Non-starchy vegetables provide vitamins, minerals and fiber, including: **Broccoli | cucumbers | green beans | onions | peppers | salad greens.**

Healthful fats help you to feel full and provide energy. Healthy options include: **Avocado | nut butter (peanut, almond, cashew) | nuts and seeds | olive oil.**

Complex carbohydrates (carbs or starches) provide energy, fiber and some nutrients. Good choices include: **Beans and lentils | berries | brown rice | sweet potatoes | whole-grain bread or crackers | low-fat dairy (milk, cheese).**

Foods to Avoid With Gestational Diabetes

Simple carbohydrates are foods that are high in sugar or foods with starches that your body converts rapidly to sugar, including:

- Sugary beverages (juices, sodas)
- White rice
- White flour (bread, tortillas, roti, cakes, pastries)
- Potato (baked, mashed, French fries, chips)
- Cereals
- Jams and jellies
- Honey
- Sugar added to coffee, tea or other drinks
- Desserts
- Sauces and condiments that contain hidden sugars (barbecue sauce, ketchup, teriyaki, syrups, some salad dressings and many others)

Additional Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
cdc.gov/diabetes/basics/gestational.html

Healthline
healthline.com/health/type-2-diabetes/best-meal-plans#foods-to-avoid

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