

Patient Information

Gestational Diabetes

If you have developed diabetes since you became pregnant, you have what is known as Gestational Diabetes. It will stay with you throughout your pregnancy but it usually disappears after the baby is born. However, it is likely to return in later pregnancies and there is also a higher chance of developing diabetes in the future, especially if you are overweight.

Diabetes is a condition where your body is unable to control the amount of sugar (glucose) in your blood. Gestational diabetes is often diagnosed at a later stage in pregnancy because this is when the levels of pregnancy hormones are very high. Pregnancy hormones can cause a rise in blood sugar.

In pregnancy it is important to keep your blood sugars at a constant level. The doctors and nurses looking after you may advise you to take medication but the most important thing you can do is be careful with which foods and drinks you choose.

Here are some basic dietary guidelines to help you do this:

Regular meals - try to make sure you eat regularly, at least 3 meals a day. If you are feeling sick or find you can't manage a full meal have smaller snacks more frequently.

Fruit – contains natural sugar and so should be eaten in moderation. Aim to keep to 1 or 2 portions of lower sugar fruit a day (see 10g snack list). Avoid fruit juice, fruit smoothies and fruit tinned in syrup.

Dairy products - These foods are a good source of protein and calcium but most contain a natural sugar called lactose. Dairy foods are important for strong bones and teeth but should be taken in moderation. They include:

- Milk – use semi-skimmed or whole milk, preferably not more than 1 pint a day. Drink one small glass at a time.
- Yoghurt – plain yoghurt is best but you can have varieties low in added sugar e.g. Muller light, Shape and Weight watchers
- Cheese – use in moderation unless you are a vegetarian when you will probably need to eat regularly to get sufficient protein.

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Foods that increase blood glucose	Foods that do not increase blood glucose
Bread, chapatti, tortilla	Vegetables
Potatoes	Salad
Rice	Meat and poultry
Pasta	Tofu and Quorn ®
Yam/Cassava/Plantain	Fish
Fufu/Eba/Gari	Eggs
Chocolate and sweets	Nuts and seeds
Fruit and fruit juice	Beans and pulses
Jam and marmalade	Marmite and peanut butter
Ice lollies and ice cream	Cream and cheese
Cereals and cereal bars	Butter and vegetable oils/spreads
Biscuits and cakes	Avocado, olives,
Squash, cordials and fizzy drinks	Sugar free or no added sugar squash, cordials and fizzy drinks
Sugar, glucose, honey, syrup	Sweeteners and sugar substitutes

Starchy carbohydrate foods.

It is important to choose wholegrain or higher fibre carbohydrate foods: whole grain or seeded bread and crackers, brown rice and wholewheat pasta. These foods are important as a source of energy but too much will raise blood glucose levels. Therefore, they should be eaten in small to moderate amounts. Aim to eat less at times when you are less physically active. For quantities see meal ideas on the last page.

In Africa and South Asian diets, starchy carbohydrates like rice, wheat, maize, yam, cassava and plantain are generally eaten in large quantities with soup, stew or curry.

If you have diabetes or are trying to control your weight, these foods need to be eaten in smaller amounts than traditionally used. It is better to eat smaller amounts of the starchy foods and increase the quantity of stew, soup and curry. In particular, try to add more vegetables.

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What should I eat?

Ideas for breakfast:

- 1 slice of whole grain or seeded bread or toast with eggs or lean bacon and tomatoes
- 1 slice of whole grain or seeded toast with a generous helping of peanut butter
- 1 slice of whole grain or seeded bread as cheese on toast
- Plain yoghurt with a handful of berries and nuts
- 1 small bowl of wholegrain cereal with plenty of milk
- 1 small bowl of porridge made with semi-skimmed or whole milk

Portion sized for midday and evening meal:

- ✓ 1 serving of lean meat, fish, cheese, eggs or pulses
- ✓ As many vegetables or salad as you can eat
- ✓ 2 portions of starchy carbohydrate – as below.

1 portion is:

- 1 large medium slice of wholemeal or multigrain bread
- 2 whole wheat crispbreads, e.g. Ryvita®
- 75g potato
- 3 small new potatoes
- 15 thin chips
- 2 heaped tablespoons (50g) boiled brown or basmati rice
- 2 tablespoons (50g) boiled whole wheat spaghetti or pasta
- 1 small chapatti
- 1 spoonful (40g) of fufu/eba/gari
- 2 small slices of yam (90g)
- 1 spoonful (60g) of couscous
- ½ large Wrap

Please remember that the above quantities are a baseline amount. When you start checking your blood glucose you will see how these portions affect you. If you are finding that your blood glucose has not risen too high an hour after eating you may find you can increase your portions as long as you do not go above 7.8mmol/l 1 hour after eating.

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'Diet' food and drinks and artificial sweeteners:

Artificial sweeteners are considered safe in small quantities and do not raise blood glucose.

Diabetic foods such as diabetic chocolate, ice cream and sweets may still contain carbohydrates. Some contain a type of sweetener which can have a laxative effect. They are expensive and not recommended.

How much weight should I gain?

If you are a healthy weight and an average height, you should expect to gain around 25-35lb (10-15kg) during your pregnancy.

If you are overweight, it is wise to try to limit your weight gain during pregnancy to 15-25lbs (5-10kg), or even less.

Exercise

Another good way to lower blood glucose levels is to exercise. When we exercise, our muscles can take in more glucose without the need for insulin. The muscles will continue to take up glucose for a number of hours after the exercise resulting in lower blood glucose levels.

Recommendations for exercise in pregnancy are the same as those for the rest of the population. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per day. If you can't manage that don't worry - the important thing is that you get some exercise, even if it's a quick 10 minute walk to the shops.