

Gestational Diabetes + Diet

What is Gestational Diabetes?

Gestational Diabetes is a type of Diabetes that occurs in women during pregnancy. It is most commonly diagnosed between weeks 24-28 of the pregnancy. It does not mean that your baby will have diabetes and it generally resolves after pregnancy.

Women who have had Gestational Diabetes have a high risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes. For this reason, it is best to have regular health checks with your doctor in the months and years following your pregnancy and adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Gestational Diabetes is most common among women:

- over 30 years of age
- with a family history of type 2 diabetes
- who are overweight
- who are Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders
- of Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Middle Eastern & Polynesian ethnicity
- who have had gestational diabetes during previous pregnancies.



What Causes Gestational Diabetes?

Hormone production and fluctuation during pregnancy can reduce the action of insulin, a hormone involved in the maintenance of stable blood glucose levels.

Insulin is released from your pancreas when blood glucose levels rise, typically after consuming food or beverages containing carbohydrates.

A reduction in the action of insulin during pregnancy requires an increased production of insulin to compensate. If the increased need for insulin is unable to be produced by the body, blood glucose levels increase and Gestational Diabetes may be diagnosed.

Being above your healthy weight before pregnancy or gaining too much weight during pregnancy can also increase the risk of developing Gestational Diabetes. To optimise your management of Gestational Diabetes, monitor and discuss weight gain with your dietitian.

How will diabetes affect my baby?

When a mother has high blood glucose levels, the developing baby may start to produce additional insulin. This additional insulin increases the growth rates of the baby. Having a large baby may require early delivery, despite not being fully mature.

Secondly, shortly after birth when the baby is no longer exposed to elevated blood glucose levels of the mother, low blood glucose levels may occur causing your baby to require specialist nursery care. However when Gestational Diabetes is well controlled, these risks are greatly reduced.

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How is Gestational Diabetes Treated?

Management of Gestational Diabetes involves:

- **Healthy Eating**
- Physical Activity
- Monitoring Blood Glucose Levels (BGL's)
- Insulin injections (for some women).

Healthy Eating

A healthy diet for a woman with Gestational Diabetes means:

- Small, regular meals distributed evenly throughout the day
- An even distribution of carbohydrates
- Choosing low glycemic index carbohydrates
- Appropriate weight gain
- Meeting all of your nutrition requirements.

Evenly distributed meals

Many Australians skip meals. However, it is very important to eat small regular meals when you have Gestational Diabetes. When carbohydrates are consumed they are broken down into glucose and absorbed into the blood stream, raising blood glucose levels. It is important to include adequate carbohydrate regularly throughout the day in portioned amounts to supply adequate energy and assist maintenance of stable blood glucose levels.

Watch your carbohydrate portions

Consuming a portioned amount of carbohydrate foods at meal and snack times can assist blood glucose control and management for Gestational Diabetes. It is recommended for *most* women with Gestational Diabetes to consume (but your dietitian will advise you if this is the right amount for you):

2-3 serves (30-45g) of carbohydrate at Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner and
1-2 serves (15-30g) of carbohydrate at Mid-Morning, Mid Afternoon and Supper

Glycemic Index (GI)

Carbohydrate products that digest more slowly are known as Low Glycemic Index (Low GI) and are the preferred choice (where possible) to help maintain healthy blood glucose levels.

Appropriate weight gain

Gaining too much weight will exacerbate your Gestational Diabetes. Your dietitian will calculate the appropriate amount of weight gain for your pregnancy, and help you track your weight.

Monitoring your Blood Glucose Levels

Monitor your blood glucose levels as directed by your treating doctor or diabetes educator. This helps them to see how your Gestational Diabetes is tracking. You can also use it to help yourself monitor which foods increase your Blood Glucose Levels too high by checking your levels two hours after eating a meal.



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