

Gestational diabetes is a special kind of diabetes that may happen during pregnancy. Changes that occur in your body while you are pregnant cause your blood sugar to be too high.

Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas needed to lower blood sugar levels. As pregnancy progresses, the pancreas cannot always make enough insulin. This leads to a rise in blood sugar levels called gestational diabetes.

**If left untreated, gestational diabetes can lead to problems for both the mother and unborn baby.**

Preeclampsia, high blood pressure in the mother, may occur. It is a very serious illness for both mother and baby.

Other problems for the baby include:

- Birth weight of more than 9 pounds (4.1 kilograms).
- Low blood sugar after birth.
- Jaundice (yellowing of eyes and skin).
- Stillbirth (dies before being born).

All pregnant women between 24 and 28 weeks are tested for gestational diabetes with an oral glucose tolerance test.

Some women may be tested earlier in the pregnancy if they have:

- Had gestational diabetes in a prior pregnancy.
- Had a baby that weighed more than 9 pounds at birth.
- High body weight.
- Excess sugar in the urine.
- Strong family history of diabetes.

### Treatment

If you are diagnosed with gestational diabetes, your doctor will refer you to a diabetes educator (nurse or dietitian).

**Most women can control gestational diabetes by making changes in diet, being more active and exercising regularly.**

The diabetes educator will teach you about:

- Healthy eating.
- Blood sugar monitoring.
- Exercise.
- Possible problems.

## **To control your blood sugar, you need to:**

- Monitor and record your blood sugar levels as ordered by your doctor.
  - Bring these recorded results to all of your doctor's visits.
- Exercise and be more active.
  - Walking 10 to 15 minutes after each meal can improve blood sugar levels.
- Eat 3 small meals and 3 to 4 healthy snacks daily.
  - Do not skip meals or snacks.
- Avoid drinks that contain sugar such as:
  - Sweetened coffee and tea
  - Regular soda
  - Juice, lemonade
  - Sports drinks and powdered drink mixes
- Avoid sweets such as candy, cake, cookies, donuts, pastries, pies, jellies, jams, and syrups.

If the changes you have made are not controlling your blood sugar levels, your doctor may need to start you on diabetes medicine.

## **Follow Up after Pregnancy**

After pregnancy, your doctor should test your blood sugar again at your postpartum visit.

Although gestational diabetes most often goes away after pregnancy, women who have had gestational diabetes are at a higher risk of developing diabetes in the future. Up to half of women with gestational diabetes may develop diabetes later in life.

### **To lower your risk of getting diabetes:**

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Have regular diabetes screenings. Do this every 1 to 3 years depending on your family history.

Talk with your diabetes educator and your other healthcare providers about your questions and concerns.