

TO YOU WHO HAVE DEVELOPED DIABETES DURING PREGNANCY (GESTATIONAL DIABETES)

WHAT IS GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

If during your pregnancy a blood-sugar test shows that your blood- sugar (glucose) level is too high, you have developed what we call gestational diabetes.

Everybody has sugar (glucose) in their blood – normally: approx 3-7.5 mmol/l. It is lowest if you have not eaten for some time (in the morning), and highest approximately 1.5-2 hours after a meal.

INSULIN is a hormone that reduces the blood-sugar level. During gestational diabetes the insulin in your body does not work as well as it should, which makes your blood-sugar level too high. We want your blood-sugar to be in the normal range around the clock. This is best for your baby's growth and development.

Broadly speaking, three factors affect your blood-sugar levels:

- the effects of the body's insulin
- your diet
- exercise

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE DEVELOP GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

- The growth hormone in the placenta can counteract the effects of the insulin
- Hereditary factors and diabetes in the family may have some effect
- Being overweight can be a triggering factor
- Women from other backgrounds than a white, European ethnic one show increased occurrences

DIETARY ADVICE FOR GESTATIONAL DIABETES

You can eat ordinary healthy food without pure sugar. Sugar eaten on its own passes quickly from the intestines into the bloodstream, which raises the blood-sugar level. Your daily food intake should be spread over 4-5 meals. It is better to have several small meals than a few large ones.

- Brown bread (with wholemeal grain and whole grain) and crispbread are good
- Milk – milk sugar is the same in all types of milk. The difference lies in the fat contents. You can drink up to a half litre daily, spread over 3 meals
- Many fibrous vegetables and legumes are good:
 - carrots, swedes/rutabaga, cauliflower and broccoli
 - lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, paprika etc

- mature legumes such as dried peas, beans and lentils
- Large amounts of potatoes, rice, spaghetti and pasta cause a rapid increase in blood-sugar levels, so it is advisable to substitute vegetables or brown bread for some of these
- Fish, trimmed meat and chicken are fine for dinner and in sandwiches
- Fruit – eat only 1 fruit at a time. You can eat up to 3 a day
- Yoghurt with bits of fruit contains both milk sugar and fruit sugar, which passes quickly into the blood stream and should therefore be limited
- Juice and soft drinks/squash and cakes, sweets etc. are not recommended
- You can use light products and artificial sweeteners in liquids and to sprinkle over food

IF YOU WERE OVERWEIGHT BEFORE PREGNANCY, YOU SHOULD ALSO THINK ABOUT FAT CONSUMPTION:

- Avoid saturated fats such as butter and hard margarines
- Limit the use of minced meat/forcemeat, sausages with high fat contents, whole fat cheeses, cream and sour cream
- Fish have unsaturated fat (healthy fat) – fatty fish and cod liver oil
- Use soft margarines and vegetable oils on bread and for cooking
- Popcorn and nuts can be used as snacks, but be careful about how much you eat

EXERCISE

Exercise will improve the effects of the insulin. Your blood-sugar levels will go slightly down. You can usually carry on with the activities you are used to, such as walking, swimming, cycling, skiing etc. If you have any discomfort or pain, you may find activities that are especially adapted for pregnant women beneficial or ask for advice from a physiotherapist.

Most women with gestational diabetes manage to achieve the objective of a satisfactory blood-sugar level by changing their diet and exercising, but some will need insulin treatment.

AFTER THE BIRTH

You can eat your normal diet after giving birth. If you have been taking insulin, you will normally stop immediately after giving birth. You will be called in for a new blood-sugar test at the Health Clinic three months after the birth. Most women will then have normal levels.

However, you will have a greater risk of developing diabetes later on in life than pregnant women who have not developed gestational diabetes. It is therefore important that you try to maintain or get down to your normal weight and that you exercise. It would be a good idea to follow the dietary advice given above.

Gestational diabetes tends to recur in later pregnancies.