

Managing Gestational Diabetes

Tips for keeping you and your baby healthy

Gestational Diabetes (GDM)

Gestational diabetes (GDM) is a type of diabetes that develops during pregnancy, usually in the second or third trimester. GDM occurs when pregnancy hormones cause your blood sugar level to rise too high. This can cause problems for you and your baby. Blood sugar levels usually go back to normal after you give birth; however, women with GDM are at increased risk for developing diabetes later in life.

You have a greater risk for GDM if you:

- Start your pregnancy overweight or gain too much weight in pregnancy
- Have a family history of diabetes
- Belong to a high risk ethnic group including: Asian, Hispanic, African American, Asian Indian, or Native American
- Have PCOS (polycystic ovarian syndrome)
- Have previously given birth to a baby weighing >9 pounds
- Had GDM in another pregnancy

If you have been diagnosed with GDM, you can prevent complications by working with your healthcare team to keep your blood sugars in the normal range. You will need to monitor your blood sugar at home and follow a healthy diet and exercise plan. You will have extra visits with your healthcare team and some extra monitoring of your baby.

What are the risks of gestational diabetes?

- Your baby can grow too big (>9 pounds) making delivery more difficult and increasing the chance you will need a C-section delivery
- Your baby can have a higher risk of being overweight later in life
- Your baby can have problems at birth, such as low blood sugar, breathing difficulty, or jaundice
- You are at greater risk for developing a dangerous pregnancy complication called preeclampsia
- Your baby can have low blood sugar after birth

Good blood sugar control throughout your pregnancy can prevent these complications. Most women with gestational diabetes have healthy babies.

How is gestational diabetes treated?

- **Diet**
- **Exercise**
- **Blood Sugar Monitoring**

The first step in treating your gestational diabetes or GDM is to meet with your diabetes educator to learn how to follow an appropriate diet and exercise plan. Your educator will also teach you how to use a glucometer to check your blood sugar. You will need to check your blood sugar several times daily until your baby is born. Some women will need medication to help control blood sugar levels.

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Where do I start?

1. Exercise

Check with your OB provider for any limits on your activity, but generally, all pregnant women should be active for at least 30 minutes daily. Walking is a good place to start. Staying active will help control your blood sugars and reduce the risk of pregnancy complications.

2. Avoid food that raise blood sugars too quickly

Fruit juices (even fresh squeezed), soda, desserts, sweets, cold cereal, and fast foods should be avoided. Carbohydrate foods such as whole grains, beans, and lentils are better for blood sugar than rice, potatoes, or processed foods.

3. Eat smaller meals

You generally cannot eat 3 large meals per day and control your blood sugar. Eating 3 smaller meals with snacks every 2-3 hours between meals will help spread out the carbohydrate in your diet to prevent higher blood sugars after eating. Studies show that eating smaller amounts more frequently is better for baby’s growth.

4. Track your weight gain

Gaining too much weight in pregnancy is not good for you or your baby. If you started pregnancy a little heavier, you do not need to gain as much weight during your pregnancy.

5. Read food labels

Read food labels for portion size and total carbohydrate. Reading labels for sugars can be misleading, as starchy foods such as rice, bread, and potato raise your blood sugar up as much or more as sugars from sweets.

6. Choose water

Plain water is best for you and your baby. Liquid sources of carbohydrate raise blood sugar more rapidly than carbohydrate from food. Choose whole fruit instead of fruit juice, and avoid sodas, lemonade, hot cocoa, and other sweet drinks.

7. Be careful with salad dressings, sauces, and condiments

Many of our favorite flavor enhancers have a high sugar content. Replace ketchup, BBQ sauce, and Teriyaki sauce with lemon juice, mustard, vinegar herbs, and spices.

Reading nutrition labels:

- Read the grams of "Total Carbohydrate" per serving, not the sugars. Carbohydrate from starch can raise blood sugar up just as much as sugar carbs.
- Not all carbohydrate foods raise blood sugar equally – rice, bread, flour tortillas, and potatoes raise blood sugar more than whole grains, beans, corn tortillas, and lentils.
- Eating protein at the beginning of a meal can help control blood sugar.
- The sample label below shows 14 grams total carbohydrate per 1 ounce serving. **Note there are 4 servings per bag; if you eat the whole bag you would be getting 56 grams of carbs!** Every 4 grams carbohydrate eaten is like eating 1 teaspoon of sugar. If you ate the whole bag of the chips below, it would raise your blood sugar up as if you had eaten 14 teaspoons of sugar.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 ounce Servings in bag 4	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 155	Calories from Fat 93
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 11g	16%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 148mg	6%
Total Carbohydrate 14g	5%
Dietary Fiber 1g	5%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 2g	
Vitamin A 0%	• Vitamin C 9%
Calcium 1%	• Iron 3%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

What should my blood sugar level be to keep my baby healthy?

- **Fasting blood sugar should be <95mg/dL. (your blood sugar when you first wake up.)**
- **Your blood sugar after eating or anytime you are not "fasting" should be <140mg/dL.**

You will need to test your blood sugar four times daily – fasting and 1 hour after meals. You cannot assume that the same meal you eat today will give you the same blood sugar value next week, so you need to continue checking until your baby is born. Blood sugar can be harder to control the closer you are to your due date.

What if my blood sugar values are too high?

If diet and exercise are not keeping your blood sugars in the normal range at least 80% of the time, your doctor will prescribe medication to help you keep your levels in range. This medication will be discontinued when your baby is born.

Your doctor may order some extra monitoring for you and your baby, such as an ultrasound, to check baby's growth, and Non-Stress Tests (NSTs).

What happens after my baby is born?

For most women, GDM goes away right at delivery. When you return for your postpartum check-up, you will have a 2-hour glucose test ordered to make sure your blood sugar levels have returned to normal.

Women with gestational diabetes are at higher risk for diabetes in the future. You can reduce this risk in the following ways:

- Lose the weight you gained in pregnancy, and lose a bit more if you started pregnancy overweight.
- **Breastfeed your baby.** Women who breastfeed have much lower risk of developing permanent diabetes.
- Continue to follow a healthy diet.
- Exercise daily. Everyone should aim to be physically active for at least 30-60 minutes every day.

Remember, most women with gestational diabetes have healthy babies. Work with your healthcare team to control your blood sugar and this will help prevent any problems for you and your baby!

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How much carbohydrate should I eat?

Your baby needs carbohydrate for growth and development. Your daily carbohydrate intake should not be less than 120 grams to 150 grams.

Breakfast should have about 15-20 grams carbohydrate because early morning hormones make blood sugar harder to control. You should eat a snack with about 15 grams to 30 grams carbohydrate every 2-3 hours between meals to help spread the carbohydrate out through the day. All meals and snacks should contain some protein. Lunch and dinner can have a bit more carbohydrate or ~ 45 grams. You can eat a bit more if you are more active since exercise lowers blood sugar!

Sample Menu 1

Sample Menu 2

	Sample Menu 1	Sample Menu 2	
Breakfast	6 oz. Greek yogurt with ≤15 grams carbohydrate 1/4 cup chopped nuts 1/2 cup berries or other fruit	1 corn tortilla or 1 whole grain toast + egg 1 oz cheese and avocado nuts	15-20 grams of carbs Avoid cold cereals or juices; they raise blood sugar too quickly!
Snack	1-2 slices whole grain wheat bread topped with 1 oz. reduced fat cheese, lettuce, and tomato	1 cup berries or 1 small apple or orange 6-8 oz. milk or yogurt (≤ 15 grams carbohydrate)	~30 grams of carbs
Lunch	Taco salad made with: mixed greens, tomatoes, onions, avocado, salsa, 3/4 cup black or pinto beans, chicken breast strips, 1 oz cheese, and tortilla chips or 1-2 small corn tortillas	Grilled cheese sandwich on whole grain bread Tomato, cucumber, and avocado 1 Kiwi	~45 grams of carbs
Snack	1 small piece of fresh fruit 1/2 cup cottage cheese 3-4 whole grain crackers	1 small apple or orange 1/4 cup almonds	~30 grams of carbs
Dinner	Large vegetable stir-fry made with: chicken, broccoli, mushrooms, onions, etc. Toss with 3 tbsp. parmesan cheese, olive oil, and 1 cup cooked pasta	3-4 oz. salmon or chicken Green beans or zucchini 1 ear corn on the cob 1/3 cup quinoa, faro, or whole grain pasta	~45 grams of carbs
Bedtime Snack	6-8 oz. milk or yogurt (≤ 15 grams carbohydrate) 1/2 cup sliced strawberries	2 small corn tortillas topped with chicken or low-fat cheese and salsa	20-30 grams of carbs

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Higher Carbohydrate Foods

This high carbohydrate food list will make it easier for you to plan your meals and snacks.

<p>Grains Includes bread, rice, whole grains, lentils, beans, and starchy vegetables</p> 	<p>Each serving has about 15 grams of Carbohydrate Read label for total carbohydrate and portion size</p>	<p>1/2 cup beans, lentils, or split peas 1 slice bread (100% whole grain is best) 1 small 6" corn tortilla or small Roti 3 cups popped popcorn 1/2 cup cooked oatmeal (not instant) 1/4 cup uncooked oats 1/3 cup cup cooked rice or pasta 1/3 ear corn on the cob 1/2 cup corn, peas, potatoes, or yams 1 cup winter squash 1/2 English muffin</p>
<p>Milk & Yogurt* Milk and yogurt have lactose – a natural sugar *cheese is listed in the protein group</p> 	<p>Each serving has about 15 grams of Total Carbohydrate</p>	<p>1 cup of milk *Almond or other Plant based “milks” can be used, but you must read the labels for carbohydrate count</p> <p>Flavored yogurt with ≤ 15 grams carbs 6 oz. plain yogurt 6-8 oz. Greek yogurt <i>Read labels for portion that = 15 grams total carbs</i></p>
<p>Fruits Fruit contains natural “fruit” sugar</p> 	<p>The portions here provide ~15 grams of Total Carbohydrate</p> <p>Avoid fruit juice</p>	<p>½ apple or 1 very small apple 1 small orange ½ pear 1 small peach or nectarine 1 tangerine ½ grapefruit 1 cup melon 1 cup berries ½ cup mango 3 dried apricots 1 Tbsp. raisins 3 prunes 10 medium cherries 17 small grapes</p>

Lower Carbohydrate Foods

This low carbohydrate food list will make it easier for you to plan your meals and snacks.

<p>Non-starchy Vegetables</p> 	<p>Choose liberal amounts of vegetables from this list</p>	<p>Non-starchy Vegetables include: broccoli, cabbage, cactus, carrots, cauliflower, eggplant, beets, okra, chili peppers, green peppers, lettuce, green beans, radishes, mushrooms, onions, spinach, tomatoes, turnips, zucchini, and summer squash</p>
<p>Protein Foods</p> 	<p>Protein foods help prevent low blood sugar. Include a good source of protein with each meal and snack. Eating protein before carbs helps control post meal sugar level.</p>	<p>Fish; Limit to < 12 oz. per week. Avoid shark, mackerel, and tile fish.</p> <p>Chicken or Turkey Beef or Pork ; Limit red meat to 2-3 servings per week Hard cheeses (Jack, Swiss, Cheddar, Parmesan) Cottage Cheese Eggs Peanut Butter ½ cup beans or lentils count as 1 oz. of protein plus a serving of whole grain.</p> <p>Limit full fat cheeses and higher fat protein sources</p>
<p>Fats and Oils</p> 	<p>Fats and oil provide essential fatty acids for your developing baby. Use sparingly if you are gaining too much weight,</p>	<p>Avocado Oils such as canola or olive Nuts and seeds including: peanuts, pistachios, almonds, cashews, sunflower seeds, and pumpkin seeds Mayonnaise Butter (small amounts)</p> <p>Limit saturated fats from sausage, bacon, butter, and red meat, as they may increase blood sugar and aren't healthy for your baby</p>