

PRODUCED BY

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Healthy Food Choices for Gestational Diabetes



What is gestational diabetes?

Gestational diabetes is a condition where the blood glucose levels are too high during pregnancy. This occurs due to changes in hormone levels, which lead to an increased demand for insulin. Insulin controls blood glucose levels and if it is unable to keep up with demand, the blood glucose level can rise above normal.

It is essential to keep blood glucose levels within the normal range for the health of both you and your baby. In some cases your blood glucose levels can be kept within the normal range by changing what you eat and by being more active. In other cases tablets or insulin injections are needed as well.

You will be provided with a blood glucose monitor so you can keep a check on your own results. **We generally aim for a blood glucose of less than 5mmol/l pre meals and below 7mmol/l 1 hour after meals.**

Why are food choices important?

By following the advice in this leaflet food choices can help you to:

- Keep blood glucose levels within the target range.
- Gain an appropriate amount of weight during the remainder of pregnancy.
- Get all the nutrients needed to keep you and your baby healthy.

General healthy eating guidelines for pregnancy apply; regular meals with an emphasis on wholegrain, higher fibre or low GI carbohydrates (carbohydrates that are slower to be digested into sugar), plenty of vegetables, salad & fruit and less sugar, fat and salt. It is essential that you eat enough of the right sort of foods to keep you and your baby well during your pregnancy.

Ask your midwife about activities that you can do during pregnancy. Regular exercise, especially if after a meal, can help keep your blood glucose levels in control.

For further information contact:

Your Dietitian:.....

Your Diabetes Specialist Nurse.....

Diabetes UK

Diabetes UK Careline Tel: 0845 – 1202960

www.diabetes.org.uk

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/gestational-diabetes

Agreed changes

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Six Steps to healthy eating for gestational diabetes

You can help to control your blood glucose levels by following the six steps below. If your blood glucose levels are not sufficiently controlled using these simple steps, your dietitian or diabetes specialist nurse may suggest further changes to your eating pattern or the types and quantities of foods that you eat.

1. **Be carbohydrate aware.**

There are two main types of carbohydrates

- Starchy foods: these include bread, pasta, rice, flour products (e.g. pastry), potatoes, yams, breakfast cereals and couscous.
- Sugars: these can be divided into
 - Naturally occurring: sugars found in fruits (fructose) and some dairy foods (lactose).
 - Added sugars: found in sweets, chocolate, sugary drinks and desserts.

All carbohydrates will have an impact on your blood glucose levels so be aware of how much you eat. Try to choose nutritious carbohydrate-containing foods such as wholegrain starchy foods, pulses, fruit and vegetables as well as some dairy foods. **It is important not to stop eating carbohydrates but you may have to reduce the amount you eat:**

- **Watch your carbohydrate portion size.** Avoid eating large amounts of carbohydrates in one sitting. Balance your meals by **adding plenty of vegetables/ lentils, beans or other proteins (such as meat, eggs or fish).**
- **Spread your carbohydrates throughout the day.** It is important to include some carbohydrates with each meal and to avoid long periods without eating. Aim for 3 meals per day and you may need snacks in between your meals.
- **Choose better sources of carbohydrates.** Oat-based cereals, basmati or brown rice, bulgar wheat, quinoa, new potatoes, sweet potato, granary or rye breads and wholemeal

pitta bread are excellent choices as they tend to raise blood glucose levels more slowly (also known as low GI carbohydrates). See www.diabetes.org.uk for more info on low GI carbohydrates.

2. Try to eat at least 5 portions of vegetables & fruit daily.

- Try to eat some vegetables, salad or fruit with each meal.
- Choose a variety of fruit (fresh, frozen, dried or tinned fruit in juice are all fine) and any vegetables.
- Lentils & beans (e.g. kidney beans, baked beans, chickpeas) are a great choice – try to include them regularly as part of meals. They are low GI, low fat and high fibre.
- Fruit makes an excellent snack but spread fruit over the day rather than eating it all at once.
- Fruit juice is quick to turn to sugar in the blood and therefore it is better to eat the whole fruit instead– use water or sugar-free drinks to quench your thirst.

3. Choose Healthy fats

- Choose oils and spreads high in monounsaturates such as olive oil and rapeseed oil and the healthy oils found in nuts, seeds and avocado.
- Choose semi-skimmed milk, cheese and yoghurts with no added sugar. Lower fat versions contain just as much calcium.
- Use lean meats and take the skin off chicken.
- Eat fish at least twice a week. Include no more than 2 portions per week of oily fish (salmon, trout, sardines, mackerel, brown crabmeat, sea bream, sea bass, turbot, halibut or rock salmon). Some fish contain significant amounts of mercury so should be avoided (shark, swordfish or marlin) & limit tuna to just 2 tuna steaks or 4 medium cans (140g) per week.

- Where possible choose fresh home cooked meals (rather than fast food, take-away or ready meals) as they are lower in fat, calories and salt.
- Eat fewer pastries, pies, crisps, cakes & biscuits, processed foods as these tend to be higher in saturated and trans fats.

Can I get any financial support to help me eat healthily?

From 10 weeks of pregnancy you may be eligible for vouchers for fruit, vegetables and milk, as well as free vitamin supplements. Call Healthy Start 08701 555455 and ask your midwife or dietitian for more information.

Will I always have diabetes?

In most cases the diabetes will go away after you have had your baby. However, you should have an HbA1c level taken at your GP surgery 3 months after giving birth to check that this is the case.

If you become pregnant again you are likely to develop gestational diabetes again. It is therefore important that you contact your GP or diabetes specialist nurse as soon as you know that you are pregnant so that appropriate checks can be made. You should also start to follow the information in this leaflet as soon as possible.

When you have had gestational diabetes you are much more likely to develop type 2 diabetes in later life. It is very important that you are tested for diabetes from now on. Remind your GP that you should have a test for diabetes every year – either a fasting blood glucose or a glucose tolerance test. Look out for the symptoms of diabetes (thirst, passing a lot of urine, tiredness, recurrent thrush, blurred vision) and seek medical advice if any of these occur.

You can reduce your risk of developing diabetes by:

- eating healthily
- taking regular exercise – that's at least 30 minutes most days of the week
- maintaining a healthy weight

Fish – white or oily fish. Fish cooks quickly and easily in a microwave. Otherwise oven bake or grill with minimal fat or oil.

- Lean cuts of meat or poultry without skin – grill, roast on a rack, casserole or griddle.
- If you have a ready meal you will generally need to have extra salad or vegetables with it to make a more balanced meal.
- Use more beans & lentils. Add these to casseroles, soups, mince dishes, curries, pasta sauces and salads.
- For dessert have fruit (fresh or tinned in juice), no added sugar yoghurt, sugar-free jelly, sugar-free custard or whip.

Snacks

The following snacks can help control hunger and keep blood sugars stable between meals and during the night. (Generally mid-morning, mid-afternoon and before bed).

- Fresh fruit (1 portion is a medium apple, pear, banana or small handful of small fruits such as grapes or berries).
- Dried fruit (eg. 2-3 dried apricots, mini box raisins).
- No added sugar yoghurt or fromage frais.
- A glass of milk
- Unsalted nuts or seeds and raisins.
- Vegetable sticks (such as carrots, tomatoes, peppers)
- Oatcakes, crackers rice cakes or crispbreads with low fat cheese spread/marmite/ peanut butter.
- 1 slice of granary toast with cream cheese/ marmite/ peanut butter.
- 1 small wholemeal pitta and houmous.
- 1 small crumpet, or slice of fruit loaf or teacake

4. Eat less sugar & sugary foods. These foods will cause blood glucose levels to rise.

- Choose still or fizzy water, herbal or fruit teas or caffeine-free tea or coffee. Low sugar or no added sugar squashes and occasional sugar-free or diet fizzy drinks.
- Either take hot drinks & cereals unsweetened or if you need to, use an artificial sweetener like Sweetex, Canderel, Splenda, Hermesetas or Stevia.
- Eat fewer puddings, cakes, biscuits, sweets and chocolates. These are generally high in fat as well as sugar and should be eaten only occasionally & in small amounts.
- Your diet does not need to be sugar-free, just low in sugar. Savoury foods that have sugar added e.g baked beans, ketchup are ok in small amounts.
- Special 'diabetic' foods are unnecessary.

5. Use less salt in cooking and on foods.

- Use black pepper, garlic, herbs and spices to flavour foods instead of salt.
- Eat fewer salty snacks like crisps. Choose unsalted nuts instead.
- Salt substitutes are not generally recommended.

6. Try not to drink any alcohol during pregnancy. If you do drink, limit to no more than 1-2 units, once or twice a week.

Weight Gain

It is important that you try not to lose weight during pregnancy. If you feel that you are losing weight, please speak to your dietitian or diabetes specialist nurse. The amount of weight that you should gain in pregnancy depends on the weight you were before getting pregnant. If you were overweight you need to gain less than someone who was underweight. Generally you should gain no more than 10-12kg (2 stone) over the 9 months.

Other important considerations during pregnancy

Protein foods: meat, chicken, fish, eggs, beans & lentils, soya or Quorn

Choose 2-3 servings of these foods everyday. Protein is needed for growth of the baby. These foods also contain iron that is necessary for the formation of red blood cells. Fortified breakfast cereals are also a source of iron and other vitamins and minerals.

Calcium containing foods: milk, cheese, yoghurt

Choose 2-3 servings of these foods everyday. Avoid unpasteurised, blue or mould-ripened cheeses. Calcium is needed for bone growth & maintenance. If you don't eat dairy foods, ask your dietitian for advice.

Vitamin Supplements

All pregnant women are advised to have 10mg Vitamin D daily. You need to take either a daily vitamin D tablet or a pregnancy specific multivitamin (containing Vit D).

Vitamin A

During pregnancy, you should avoid taking any vitamin or fish oil supplement that contains vitamin A (eg. cod liver oil) and you should not eat liver or liver products (eg. pâté) as they are rich in vitamin A. Too much vitamin A can build up and can cause serious harm to your baby.

Caffeine

Pregnant women should try to limit caffeine to: No more than 2 drinks per day (coffee, tea, cola). Chocolate or energy drinks should be limited anyway when you have gestational diabetes. Decaffeinated tea and coffee is fine.

Food safety

Refer to the leaflets that were provided earlier in your pregnancy. Ask your midwife or dietitian if you have any questions or concerns.

Suggested Meal Ideas

Breakfast

- Lean grilled bacon/ scrambled egg/ tomatoes/ avocado or mushrooms on granary toast.
- Natural yoghurt, fruit and a couple of spoons of muesli
- High fibre cereal e.g. shredded wheat topped with semi-skimmed milk
- Porridge made with semi-skimmed milk.
- Wholemeal English muffin with spread and peanut butter.
- ½ grapefruit. Granary toast with spread & Marmite

Light meals

- Use different breads for sandwiches like wholemeal, granary, wholemeal pittas or rolls, rye bread.
- Fill your chosen bread with fillings like lean chicken or turkey, hardboiled egg, ham, tuna, salmon, houmous, hard cheese (such as cheddar/edam), drained tinned beans (eg. chickpeas). Add salad, low fat mayonnaise, pickle or chutney as desired.
- Baked beans, cheese or tinned fish on granary toast.
- Make pasta or rice salads using plenty of vegetables such as peppers, sweetcorn, cucumber, cherry tomatoes and olive oil, lemon, vinegar or salad dressing. Add tuna, chicken, tinned beans or cheese.
- Soups with beans or lentils added and served with granary bread.

Main meals/ Recipes

- Serve all main meals with plenty of vegetables or salad and include some starchy food like pasta, rice or potatoes but watch portion sizes.
- See www.diabetes.org.uk for recipe ideas.