

# GESTATIONAL DIABETES

my pregnancy, my baby, and me





Hello!

You want to have a healthy baby and keep yourself healthy, too. Sometimes people feel overwhelmed when they are told they have gestational diabetes, and you may feel this, too. We hope the information and ideas in this pamphlet are helpful to you. Balancing food and activity help manage gestational diabetes. Your health care provider and registered dietitian will help you learn what works best for you.

Best wishes!

Sincerely, Your WIC program staff

You can learn more about gestational diabetes by visiting these websites:



Gestational Diabetes  
Symptoms, Treatments  
American Diabetes  
Association  
(diabetes.org)



Gestational Diabetes  
and Pregnancy  
Centers for Disease  
Control (cdc.gov)



Gestational Diabetes  
- National Institute of  
Diabetes and Digestive  
and Kidney Diseases  
(niddk.nih.gov)



Gestational Diabetes  
American Congress  
of Obstetricians and  
Gynecologists  
(acog.org)

## **What is Gestational Diabetes?**

Gestational diabetes happens during pregnancy when too much glucose (blood sugar) stays in the blood instead of being used for energy. Insulin is a hormone made by our body that helps us use blood sugar for energy and keeps blood levels stable. Pregnancy hormones can interfere with insulin. In some cases, the body can't make enough insulin and blood sugar levels go up. This is gestational diabetes.

## **Are blood sugar and blood glucose the same thing?**

Yes. We use the term blood sugar in this material.

## **What does this mean for my pregnancy?**

When your blood sugar is high during pregnancy, extra sugar goes to your baby.

- » Your baby gets extra calories from the sugar and stores them as fat. This can make your baby weigh more at birth and make delivery harder.
- » Your baby's pancreas makes extra insulin to handle the high blood sugar from you.
- » After birth, your baby keeps making extra insulin. This causes your baby to have low blood sugar.

Testing and managing your blood sugar will help you and your baby be healthy!

When your blood sugar stays high, you may develop problems such as:

- » High blood pressure (hypertension)
- » Bladder infection (urinary tract infection)
- » Your baby may grow to a size that might require a C-section (cesarean section) to be delivered safely.



*“By watching the foods I eat and adding some activity to my day, I’ve been able to keep my blood sugar in the normal range. It’s been easier than I thought and I’m glad I made these changes to keep us both healthy.”*

## **What does gestational diabetes mean for my baby?**

Keeping your blood sugar at recommended levels while you are pregnant will help protect and keep your baby growing well.

If your blood sugar stays high, your baby has an increased risk of:

- » Having a yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- » Having a difficult birth that causes shoulder problems (brachial plexus).
- » Needing to stay in the hospital extra days after birth with very low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).
- » Having breathing problems (respiratory distress syndrome).
- » Possible breastfeeding difficulties.
- » Having type 2 diabetes later in life.
- » Being stillborn.

## How can I take care of myself and my baby now that I have gestational diabetes?

- » Learn about how foods impact your blood sugar.
- » Have a regular meal and snack pattern to help keep your blood sugar stable.
- » Talk to a registered dietitian and/or certified diabetes care and education specialist about habits to manage your gestational diabetes.
- » Test your blood sugar as recommended by your health care provider.
- » Ask your health care provider about activities you can do. Activity helps you use blood sugar.
- » Use insulin as your health care provider advises.
- » Go to all health care and WIC appointments during your pregnancy.



*“It’s really important for me to be active and eat nutritious foods during my pregnancy.”*

**Your health care provider or clinic will help you learn to test your blood sugar and keep it at a level that is good for you and your baby.**

## Why is activity important?

Activity helps lower your blood sugar.

Here's some ideas that worked for other expecting parents:

"I take a short walk and I even feel better when I get back."

"After I've eaten, I do some light stretching and sometimes walk in place for a few minutes."

"I put on some music and dance!"

"I take my kids to the park. They love the swings."

"I found when I cleaned up around the house or did a little light housework after eating, it helped my blood sugar. Folding clothes, washing dishes, sweeping the floor, or putting things away made a difference."

## How/What should I eat?

Eat healthy meals or snacks every few hours.

Include protein with meals and snacks.

Have a bedtime snack that includes foods with both protein and carbohydrate.

Examples:

- » A tortilla with scrambled egg
- » Plain unsweetened yogurt

Choose foods that won't raise your blood sugar too much like protein foods and non-starchy vegetables. Protein foods also help you feel satisfied and help your baby grow.

Protein Foods Include:

- » Eggs
- » Chicken or Turkey
- » Lean meats
- » Cheese
- » Fish
- » Plain unsweetened yogurt (also provides carbohydrate)
- » Tofu
- » Peanut Butter/Nuts/Seeds
- » Beans (also provides carbohydrate)

### Food safety reminders:

- » Fully cook all meat, chicken, turkey, fish, and eggs.
- » Heat deli meats, hot dogs, and cold cuts until steaming.
- » Don't eat soft cheeses (such as: feta, blue, brie, queso blanco, queso fresco.)
- » If you eat fish, ask WIC or your health care provider for more information.

Visit [doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/food/fish/women-and-children](https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/food/fish/women-and-children) to learn more about safely eating fish during pregnancy.



## What are non-starchy vegetables?

Non-starchy vegetables don't raise blood sugar very much. They are also full of nutrients! They are full of vitamins and minerals your body needs, and have fiber, which helps you feel full, and helps you avoid constipation. Try to add vegetables to your meals and snacks. Have them cooked and served with little sauce or butter, in soups, or in salads.

Examples:

- » Greens – lettuce, spinach, collard, chard, kale, bok choy,
- » Broccoli
- » Cauliflower
- » Brussel sprouts
- » Cabbage
- » Carrots
- » Celery
- » Cucumber
- » Mushrooms
- » Okra
- » Peppers
- » Tomatoes
- » Zucchini

*"By including a protein food with my meals and snacks, I've been able to keep my blood sugar more stable. I don't let myself get too hungry, so I eat something every 2 or 3 hours."*



## What about Carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates provide important nutrients and give us energy. You and your baby need energy from carbohydrates when you are pregnant. However, too many high carbohydrate foods can make your blood sugar go up too high. Keep portion sizes smaller when you eat these higher carbohydrate foods:

- Fruit
- Milk
- Starchy vegetables
  - Corn
  - Peas
  - Potatoes
  - Winter Squash
  - Beans (such as: pinto, black, garbanzo)
- Grains\*
  - Bread
  - Noodles
  - Rice
  - Tortillas

## What foods should I be careful with?

Foods that have added sugar can quickly raise your blood sugar. Try to avoid sweet and sugary foods during your pregnancy. If you do eat them, limit the amounts by:

- » Choosing smaller portions
- » Eating them along with a meal or snack

Avoid or limit sweet foods like:

- » regular soda
- » honey
- » cakes
- » cookies
- » candy
- » fruit juice and fruit drinks
- » sugary drinks like Kool-Aid and lemonade
- » sweet coffee drinks
- » jams
- » pies

\* Choose whole grain varieties when possible. Whole grains include more nutrients and fiber.



### Snacks Ideas:

- » Boiled Eggs
- » Yogurt - try low sugar or plain
- » Celery with peanut butter
- » Hummus or Peanut Butter with vegetables
- » Nuts
- » String Cheese

## What is the Diabetes Plate Method?

Some people like using the simple Diabetes Plate Method to plan meals and balance food choices. To follow the plate method, fill half your plate with non-starchy vegetables, a quarter with protein, and one quarter with carbohydrate foods like whole grains, starchy vegetables, or fruit.

*Learn more about the Diabetes Plate Method*



## What happens after delivery?

For most people, blood sugar levels return to non-diabetes levels after their baby is born. However, people who have gestational diabetes are at an increased risk to get type 2 diabetes in their lifetime. It's important to get tested for diabetes if you had gestational diabetes:

- » Test for diabetes six weeks after delivery.
- » Retest for diabetes every year.

Ask your health care provider or clinic for the test if the test is not offered to you.

## Can I breastfeed my baby?

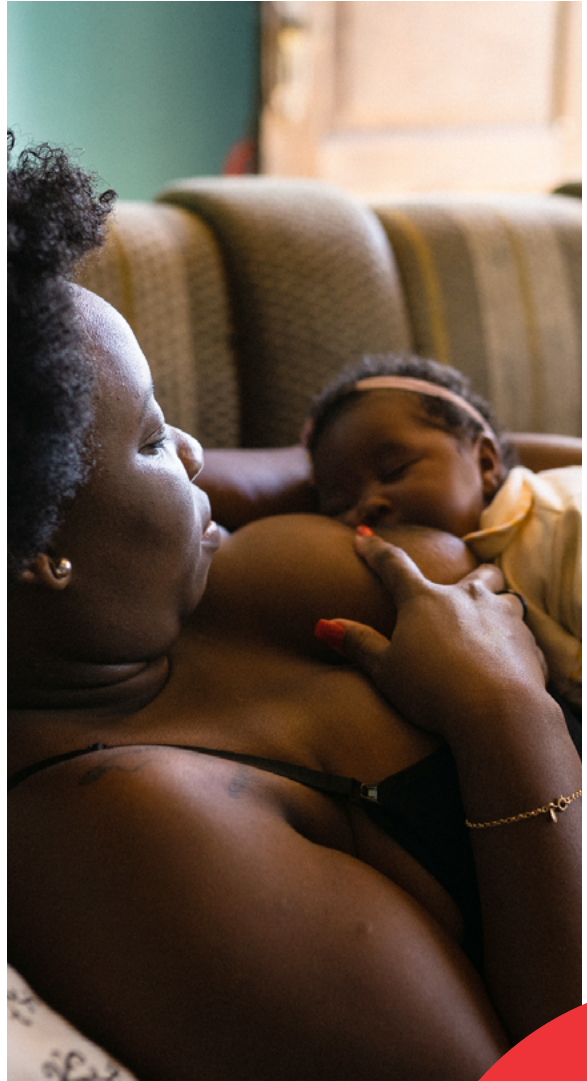
Yes!

Human milk is the best source of nutrition for babies. As your baby grows, your milk changes to meet your baby's nutritional needs. Breast or chestfeeding babies are less likely to have ear infections and stomach illnesses. Breastfed babies also have a lower risk of some diseases, including diabetes.

There are also benefits for you! Some cancers, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure are less common in people who breast or chestfeed.

## How can I help prevent or delay type 2 diabetes?

- » Eat nutritious foods. Go for: whole grains, vegetables, fruit, lean meats, low fat dairy, nuts, seeds, and beans.
- » Make water your go-to drink.
- » Be physically active most days of the week.
- » Get tested for diabetes every year.



## How can I keep my baby healthy as they grow?

- » Breast or chestfeed your baby for as long as you both desire.
- » Introduce solid foods when baby is around 6 months old.
- » Be active and show your child how to be active.
- » Make mealtime a family time.
- » Go to all health care visits, let their provider know you had gestational diabetes.
- » Stay on WIC.

## What I can do to manage my gestational diabetes:

- » Be active every day.
- » Get enough sleep and rest every day.
- » Drink water or other unsweetened drinks such as herbal tea.
- » Eat every few hours.
- » Eat whole grains, non-starchy vegetables, fruit, lean meats, low fat dairy, nuts, seeds, and beans.
- » Include protein with meals and snacks.
- » Check your blood sugar levels.
- » Go to your prenatal appointments.
- » Ask your health care provider or WIC if you have questions.



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