

# GESTATIONAL DIABETES

## DEFINITION

Gestational Diabetes occurs in 5-10% of pregnancies. Diabetes interferes with how your body is able to use the sugar (carbohydrates) you take in. Women with gestational diabetes have elevated blood glucose levels. Gestational Diabetes occurs in the last half of pregnancy.

## CAUSES

Pregnancy affects how the body processes or uses up glucose. Your body breaks down the foods you eat to produce sugar (glucose) that enters your bloodstream. The pancreas produces *insulin*, a hormone that moves the glucose from your bloodstream into the cells where it is used for energy.

In pregnancy the placenta produces hormones that may interfere with how insulin works. Hormones produced by the placenta make it more difficult for insulin to carry the glucose in your bloodstream into your cells where it can get used for energy. This causes the level of glucose in the blood to be increased. As pregnancy progresses the placenta produces more and more insulin blocking hormones. In gestational diabetes these hormones cause the blood sugar to rise to levels that can affect the growth and welfare of the baby.

## RISK FACTORS

<b>Age &gt;25</b>	<b>Being Overweight (BMI &gt;30)</b>
<b>Personal or Family History of Diabetes</b>	<b>Nonwhite Race (Asian, Hispanic, Indian, African American)</b>

## COMPLICATIONS

Most women with gestational diabetes deliver healthy babies. However gestational diabetes that is not carefully managed can lead to high blood sugar levels that can cause problems for both the mother and baby.

Complications that may affect the baby:

- Excessive birth weight. Extra glucose (sugar) in your blood stream crosses the placenta easily. Babies that are exposed to extra glucose gain extra weight. Large babies are more likely to experience injury during delivery and may need to be delivered by C section.
- Preterm delivery: A mother's high blood sugar can increase the risk for early labor.
- Respiratory distress syndrome. A condition that affects the baby's ability to breathe normally.
- Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Sometimes babies born to mothers with gestational diabetes experience low blood sugar soon after birth. Severe episodes of hypoglycemia can lead to seizures in newborns. If the baby does not respond to feedings they may need an IV with a glucose solution.

Type 2 diabetes later in life. Babies of mothers with gestational diabetes have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes (adult onset) later in life.

**Complications that may affect you:**

- High blood pressure, preeclampsia and eclampsia. Gestational diabetes increases your risk for developing high blood pressure during pregnancy. It also raises your risk for developing preeclampsia and eclampsia. Two serious complications of pregnancy that can threaten the lives of both the baby and mother.
- Future diabetes. If you have gestational diabetes in one pregnancy it is more likely that you can have gestational diabetes in future pregnancies, It is also more likely that you may develop overt diabetes later in life.

## **TREATMENT**

It is very important to monitor and control your blood sugar to keep your baby healthy and avoid complications during your pregnancy and delivery.

- Monitoring your blood sugar. You will be asked to check and record your blood sugar four times each day. Fasting, first thing in the morning *before* having anything to eat or drink and 2 hours *after* each meal. Although this may sound inconvenient and difficult please remember that this is the best way to monitor gestational diabetes and prevent complications for both you and your baby.
- Healthy diet. Eating the right kinds and amounts of foods is the best way to control your blood sugar. A healthy diet focuses on fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains; foods that are high in nutrition and low in fat and calories and low in

refined carbohydrates. The American Diabetes Association has a helpful website. It is important to remember that making good food choices can help eliminate the need for medication.

- Exercise. Regular physical activity is important to health and wellness. Exercise lowers your blood sugar by stimulating your body to move glucose into your cells. Women with gestational diabetes should exercise for 30 minutes each day. Walking, cycling and swimming are great exercise for pregnant women.
- Medication. If diet and exercise are not successful in maintaining a healthy blood sugar, you may need medication. Two medications commonly used in pregnancy are glyburide (a pill) and insulin (an injection).