

Healthy eating

for gestational diabetes

What is gestational diabetes?

Gestational diabetes occurs in about 3-8% of pregnant women. It happens because the changing hormone levels in the body have altered the body's requirement for insulin. Gestational diabetes is usually temporary and goes away after the baby is born. To effectively manage gestational diabetes, it is important to control your blood glucose levels while maintaining a healthy diet. This information sheet gives advice on healthy eating and is to be read in conjunction with Diabetes Australia's information sheet *Gestational Diabetes*.

How healthy eating helps

Following a healthy eating plan will assist in:

- managing your blood glucose levels within the target range advised by your doctor
- providing adequate nutrition for you and your growing baby
- achieving appropriate weight changes during your pregnancy

What foods should I eat?

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrate foods are broken down into glucose and used for energy. They are very important for you and your baby. To help manage your blood glucose levels, it is important to spread your carbohydrate foods over 3 small meals and 2-3 snacks each day. Foods containing carbohydrate include:

- breads and breakfast cereals
- pasta, rice and noodles
- potato, sweet potato and corn
- legumes such as baked beans, red kidney beans and lentils
- fruits
- milks, yoghurts and calcium fortified soy milk

Carbohydrate foods that contain little nutritional value include sucrose (table sugar), soft drinks, cordials, fruit juices, lollies, cakes and biscuits. It is wise to avoid these foods.

In some instances, women may be eating the right amount and type of carbohydrate foods for their body, but still have high blood glucose levels. If this happens, it is important not to cut back on carbohydrates. Some women's bodies require a little extra help to manage blood glucose levels and insulin may be needed.

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Fat

Try to limit the amount of fat you eat, particularly saturated fat. Use healthy fats like canola, olive and polyunsaturated oils and margarines, avocados and unsalted nuts. To limit your saturated fat intake, select lean meats, skinless chicken and low fat dairy foods and avoid takeaway and processed foods. While fat does not directly affect your blood glucose levels, if eaten in large amounts, all fats can cause extra weight gain.

Protein

Include 2 small serves of protein each day as protein is important for the growth and maintenance of the body. Protein foods include lean meat, skinless chicken, fish, eggs and reduced fat cheese. These foods do not directly affect your blood glucose levels. Milk, yoghurts, custards and legumes are also important sources of protein. However, remember that they also contain carbohydrate.

Calcium and iron

Calcium and iron requirements are increased during pregnancy. Try to include 2-3 serves of low fat calcium rich foods each day (1 serve = 250ml milk or calcium fortified soy milk, 200g of yoghurt or 2 slices of cheese). The iron from red meat, chicken and fish is readily absorbed. However, if you are a vegetarian or do not eat these foods regularly, an iron supplement or pregnancy multivitamin may be required. Discuss this with your doctor or dietitian.

Other dietary considerations

Nutritious foods that will not cause excess weight gain or cause your blood glucose levels to go up can be eaten freely. These foods include fruits such as strawberries, passionfruit, lemons and limes and all vegetables (except potato, corn, sweet potato, taro and legumes). Try to include at least 2 cups of vegetables each day.

You should continue to avoid those foods that put you at risk of contracting listeria.

What can I drink?

Choose mainly water, plain mineral water and soda water – try it with fresh lemon or lime for something different.

Can I use artificial sweeteners?

The following sweeteners may be used in small amounts: Aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal) (951), Sucralose (Splenda) (955), Isomalt (953), Acesulphame K (950) and Alitame (Aclame) (956).

Does it help to keep active?

For women with gestational diabetes, moderate intensity physical activity can help to manage blood glucose levels. 'Moderate' means a slight but noticeable increase in breathing and heart rate. If there are no specific obstetric or medical conditions, you should be able to safely exercise during pregnancy. However, it is best to discuss this with your doctor.

Suggested meal plan

The following meal plan offers guidance about what to eat. For those interested in knowing which foods have a lower glycaemic index, these have been listed in **bold**.

This meal plan is a basic guide only. It is recommended you see a dietitian for more specific advice about what's right for you. (Refer page 4).

<p>Breakfast: choose from...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 cup untoasted muesli/ All Bran/rolled oats (raw) or 1 cup Guardian/Special K <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-2 slices of toast (multigrain, soy & linseed, wholemeal, white, heavy fruit bread) <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 slice of toast with 1/2 cup baked beans <p>with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 250ml low fat milk, or 100g low fat fruit yoghurt or 200g artificially sweetened yoghurt 	<p>Afternoon tea: choose from...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 250ml low fat milk or 100g low fat yoghurt or 200g artificially sweetened yoghurt <p>plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 slice heavy fruit loaf, 1 crumpet or 1/2 English muffin
<p>Morning Tea: choose from...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Vita Weats, 1/2 English muffin or 1 slice toast <p>with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> small amount of reduced fat cheese <p>plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 serve of fruit (1 serve = <i>apple, pear, small banana, 2 kiwi fruits, 4 apricots, 1/2 cup tinned fruit, 2tbsp sultanas</i>) 	<p>Dinner: choose from...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2/3 cup cooked rice (Basmati/Doongara), 1 cup of cooked pasta/noodles, or 1 medium potato (or 1/2 cup sweet potato) and a small corn cob <p>with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a small serve of lean meat, fish, chicken or tofu <p>with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> plenty of salad or cooked vegetables (remember corn and potato are carbohydrates) <p>plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 serve of fruit
<p>Lunch: choose from...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 slices of bread, 1 medium bread roll, 2/3 cup cooked rice (Basmati/Doongara) or 1 cup cooked pasta/noodles <p>with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tuna, salmon, fresh chicken, egg, roast beef or reduced fat cheese <p>with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> plenty of salad or cooked vegetables (other than potato and corn) <p>plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 serve of fruit 	<p>Supper: choose from...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 cup low fat custard, 2 small scoops low fat ice cream, 100g low fat yoghurt or 200g artificially sweetened yoghurt <p>plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 serve of fruit

Note: The foods listed in bold have a low GI. Diabetes Australia's information sheet Glycaemic Index gives more useful details about GI.

Healthy eating for gestational diabetes continued

What about breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding is recommended for all women. It provides the best start for your baby and can help you to return to your pre-pregnancy weight.

Am I at risk of developing type 2 diabetes?

While blood glucose levels usually return to normal after the birth, women who have had gestational diabetes are at an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

What can I do to reduce the risk?

To reduce your risk or delay the development of type 2 diabetes, keep in mind the following important points:

Maintain or achieve a healthy weight

Balancing your food intake with your activity levels is the best way to maintain or reduce any excess body weight.

Eat healthily

- Limit saturated fat. Choose lean meat, skinless chicken and low fat dairy foods. Limit processed and fried foods.
- Eat plenty of vegetables, legumes, fruits and wholegrain breads and cereals.

Be physically active

Aim to include at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days. You may wish to discuss your physical activity plans with your doctor.

It is recommended that every woman with gestational diabetes see a dietitian who will help put into practice the recommendations in this information sheet. To find an Accredited Practising Dietitian, contact Diabetes Australia (1300 136 588), the Dietitians Association of Australia (1800 812 942 or www.daa.asn.au) or your hospital's maternity unit.

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