

What You Should Know About Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) is a condition in women who have high blood sugar levels for the first time during pregnancy. Your body needs glucose (sugar) for energy, but too much glucose may be harmful for you or your baby.

What are the symptoms of gestational diabetes?

Most women with GDM do not have symptoms but are diagnosed from blood screening (oral glucose tolerance test) done around weeks 24 to 28 of pregnancy. Some women with GDM notice great thirst or increased urination.

What causes gestational diabetes?

Your body's need for insulin, which helps glucose move from your blood to your cells for energy, increases as the baby grows. Sometimes pregnancy hormones interfere with insulin and can cause a rise in blood sugar levels.

Some risk factors for GDM include being older than 25; family history of diabetes; being overweight; already giving birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds or with a birth defect; and being of black, Hispanic, American Indian, or Asian race.

How does gestational diabetes affect me and my baby?

Having GDM increases the risk for high blood pressure, which is a potentially dangerous complication in pregnancy. Poorly controlled GDM may result in a very large baby who may be at risk for injury during delivery. In some patients, cesarean delivery may lower this risk. The baby may be born with low blood sugar, breathing problems, or jaundice, and may be at risk for obesity or type 2 diabetes later in life.

GDM will probably go away after your baby is born, but you should be monitored for diabetes regularly in the future.

How is gestational diabetes treated?

You can minimize the risks of GDM and have a healthy pregnancy by keeping your blood glucose levels under control with guidance from your health care provider. This will involve following a healthy diet, getting physical activity, and for some women, taking medication. Your clinician may have you use a small blood glucose meter at home to help you check for your target levels.



For more information

Your clinician will help you monitor your condition to give you the best outcomes for your baby's birth. There are also many online sources, including:

- *American Diabetes Association*
www.diabetes.org
- *National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse*
<http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/gestational>
- *National Institutes of Health*
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001898.

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