

Gestational diabetes: eating well and managing your blood glucose

Dietetics Service

Information for patients and carers

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Caring for you

What is gestational diabetes?

Gestational diabetes is a type of diabetes that develops during pregnancy.

It means your blood glucose (sometimes called blood sugar) is too high. This happens because insulin does not work as well during pregnancy.

What is insulin?

Insulin is a hormone that helps control the amount of glucose in your blood.

High blood glucose can affect how your baby grows.

Keeping your blood glucose within the target range helps your baby grow and develop well.

For many people, gestational diabetes goes away after their baby is born.

Checking your blood glucose

Your pregnancy care team will give you a glucose meter and teach you how to use it.

Your pregnancy care team will show you how and when to test.

Your blood glucose targets

When to test	Target level
Before breakfast (fasting)	Below 5.3 millimoles per litre (mmol/L)
1 hour after meals	Below 7.8 mmol/L

If you use insulin, you may need to test more often.

How can I manage my blood glucose?

You can help keep your blood glucose within the target range by:

- eating healthy foods
- being physically active
- taking any medicines prescribed for you

Some people need tablets or insulin injections. Your diabetes team will tell you if you need these.

Eating well in pregnancy

Healthy eating during pregnancy is important for you and your baby. It can also help the whole family eat well.

Eat regular meals

Try to eat regular meals and snacks throughout the day.

Do not skip meals.

Skipping meals can make you very hungry later. This may make you more likely to:

- eat too much
- choose sugary foods

Both can make your blood glucose rise.

Include starchy foods with meals

Starchy foods give your body energy. Examples include:

- bread
- rice
- pasta
- potatoes
- breakfast cereals

Choose high-fibre options when possible. They can help reduce constipation.

Choose low glycaemic index (GI) carbohydrates as these may raise your blood glucose more slowly.

Examples include:

- seeded or granary bread
- basmati rice
- oats
- wholegrain cereals

Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day

Fruit and vegetables have:

- vitamins
- minerals
- fibre

Eat less fat

Choose healthier ways of cooking such as grilling, baking and steaming instead of frying. This can help stop too much weight gain during pregnancy.

It will also reduce the amount of saturated fat which can stop your insulin from working properly.

Saturated fat is a type of fat that is solid at room temperature. It is found in many foods we eat, such as:

- butter, cheese, and other dairy
- burgers, sausages, and pizza
- cakes, pastries, and ice cream
- chocolate biscuits

Include foods with iron

Iron helps your body make red blood cells for you and your baby.

Foods with iron include:

- lean red meat
- eggs
- fortified breakfast cereals
- bread
- dried fruit
- nuts
- seeds
- beans

Your doctor may prescribe iron tablets if your iron level is low.

Do not drink alcohol

There is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy.

Avoid foods labelled as diabetic products

These foods can be:

- expensive
- high in fat
- more likely to cause diarrhoea (tummy upset)

Eat less salt

Try to:

- eat fewer salty foods
- avoid adding salt during cooking and at the table

This will help control your blood pressure.

Follow food safety advice

Avoid foods that may contain harmful bacteria (known as listeria), including:

- unpasteurised milk
- some cheeses
- some fish
- pâté
- liver

These foods may harm your baby.

Drink enough fluids

Drink at least 2 litres of fluid each day. This is about 8 glasses.

Drinking enough helps stop:

- dehydration
- tiredness
- constipation

Drink more if you are being sick a lot.

Limit caffeine

Have no more than 200milligram (mg) of caffeine each day.

Drink	Amount of caffeine
Mug of tea	50mg
Mug of instant coffee	50mg
Mug of filter coffee	140mg
Energy drink	80mg to 160mg
Cola or diet cola	40mg to 50mg

More than 200mg of caffeine each day may cause problems in pregnancy.

It may mean your baby is born smaller.

Eating well with gestational diabetes

Food has 3 main nutrients:

- carbohydrate
- fat
- protein

Carbohydrates affect your blood glucose the most.

You still need carbohydrates for energy, but the type and amount you eat matter.

There are 4 types of carbohydrate:

- starch
- fructose (fruit sugar)
- lactose (milk sugar)
- glucose/sucrose

Starchy carbohydrate foods

Do not cut out starchy foods completely.

Choose smaller portions and try these healthier options:

- bread - high fibre types like granary, seeded and sourdough
- rice - basmati or brown
- pasta - wholemeal pasta
- potatoes - with skins on like jacket potatoes and new potatoes
- breakfast cereals - wholegrain options, oats, bran

Fructose

Fructose is the natural sugar found in fruit.

Fruit can raise your blood glucose, but it is still an important part of a healthy diet because it has vitamins and fibre.

Fresh, frozen, tinned and dried fruit can all be part of a healthy diet. However, portion sizes are different for each type.

Aim for no more than 2 portions of fruit a day. Spread them across the day rather than eating them all at once.

Examples include:

- 1 apple
- 1 small banana
- 2 satsumas
- 1 handful of berries

Avoid:

- fruit juice
- smoothies

These can raise blood glucose quickly.

Lactose

Lactose is the sugar found in milk and dairy foods. These foods contain calcium, which helps keep your bones and your baby's bones healthy.

Aim for no more than 1 pint of milk each day.

Choose low sugar options where possible.

Good choices include:

- plain Greek yoghurt
- no added sugar yoghurt

Glucose / sucrose – foods with added sugar

You do not need to cut out sugar completely but try to have sugary foods less often.

Swap this: high sugar and low fibre	For this: low sugar and high fibre
Sugar of all types, glucose, syrup, treacle and half-sugars	Try without, or use artificial sweeteners such as Truvia™, Canderel™, Sweetex™, Splenda™ or a supermarket own brand
Sweets, toffees, mints and chocolates	Sugar-free sweets, mints or chewing gum
Jam, marmalade and honey	Peanut butter with no added sugar, Marmite™ or cream cheese
Fizzy drinks, cordials and fresh fruit juice	Sugar-free, no-added-sugar or diet drinks, and still or fizzy mineral water
Sweet biscuits	1 or 2 plain biscuits, such as Rich Tea™ biscuits, oatcakes or digestive biscuits
Cakes and pastries	Currant bread or scones
Tinned fruit in syrup	Tinned fruit in juice, drained
Sugar- or honey-coated breakfast cereals	Plain cereal, for example Weetabix™, Shredded Wheat™ or porridge oats
Hot chocolate drinks	Low-calorie hot chocolate, such as Cadbury Highlights™ or Cadbury Options™, or cocoa with sweetener

How much should I eat?

Carbohydrates

Aim for these amounts to help control your blood glucose:

Meal	Total carbohydrate
Breakfast	20g to 40g
Lunch	40g to 50g
Evening meal	40g to 50g
Snacks	No more than 10g to 15g

Meal ideas

Breakfast

- 1 to 2 slices of granary or seeded toast with a topping:
 - eggs (boiled, poached, scrambled)
 - peanut butter (no added sugar)
 - avocado
- Omelette with:
 - vegetables
 - lean meat
 - cheese
- wheat or oat cereal with milk such as:
 - 2 Weetabix™, Oatbix™ or Shredded Wheat™
 - ¾ cup of bran flakes or no added sugar muesli
 - 27grams (g) plain porridge oats (1 x sachet)
- yoghurt:
 - 6-8 tablespoons of Greek-style yoghurt with 1 tablespoon of berries

Lunch

- sandwich with 1-2 slices of medium granary/seeded bread or 1 wholemeal tortilla wrap with a choice of fillings, such as:
 - lean meat
 - low-fat cheese or egg
 - vegetables/salad

- 1 medium granary/seeded bread slice with ½ tin reduced sugar baked beans
- 1 wholemeal pitta bread with 4 tablespoons hummus and salad or raw veg
- soup (vegetable/lentil/meat) with 1-2 slices of medium granary/seeded bread
- vegetable/meat/fish/lentil curry with 5 tablespoons of cooked basmati rice or 1 chapatti
- cottage cheese
- a hand sized baked potato with a choice of fillings, such as:
 - 3 tablespoons reduced sugar baked beans
 - tin of tuna
 - cheese

Add plenty of salad or vegetables.

Evening meal

- 3 meat/veggie sausages with 5 tablespoons of mash potato and vegetables
- vegetable/meat/fish/lentil curry with 5 tablespoons of cooked basmati rice or 1 chapatti
- beef/meat-free Bolognese sauce with 5 tablespoons of cooked pasta
- meat/fish fillet with 1 hand-sized baked potato and veg/salad
- 1 oven baked breaded fish fillet with 1 handful of oven chips and veg/salad
- beef/veggie burger in a brioche bun with side salad
- 4 small roast potatoes, roast meat/meat alternative, vegetables, gravy
- ½ thin-crust pizza* with side salad *only choose occasionally*

Add plenty of salad or vegetables.

Snacks

Try not to snack too often.

If you are hungry between meals, choose snacks that have under 10g of carbohydrate.

Very low-carbohydrate snacks

- hard boiled eggs
- vegetable sticks such as cucumber or carrot
- cheese (small matchbox size)
- cooked cold meat slices
- cocktail sausages/Quorn™ pieces
- gherkins and pickled onions

Less than 10g carbohydrate snacks

- Greek yoghurt (100g pot)
- no added sugar yoghurt (115g pot)
- low-fat cottage cheese (100g)

- 1 plain savoury rice cake
- 2 breadsticks or cheese straws
- 1 digestive biscuit

Could I get diabetes after pregnancy?

Gestational diabetes increases your chance of developing type 2 diabetes in the future.

About 5 in 10 people who have gestational diabetes may develop type 2 diabetes later in life. You can lower your chance by:

- being physically active
- keeping a healthy weight
- eating a healthy, balanced diet with a low GI
- choosing lower carbohydrate foods that raise blood glucose more slowly

If you need support after your baby is born, speak to your GP.

They can tell you about local services that can help.

Where to get further advice

Diet advice

Ask your pregnancy care team to refer you to a dietitian using BadgerNet.

You will be referred to the National Diabetes Prevention Programme (NDPP) by your GP unless you ask not to be.

Contact us

Community Dietitians

Email: ncm.dietitians@nhs.net
Call: 01925 662459

Warrington Maternity Triage

For any concerns during your pregnancy call 01925 275200

Useful websites and information

Healthy Eating for Gestational Diabetes (Full Video) (Produced by Dietitians)
<https://youtu.be/GLwZLmCbziQ>

British Dietetic Association (BDA) Gestational Diabetes
<https://www.bda.uk.com/static/e2c3fac8-7a56-4f89-849ac39e97f185fe/fdf5043b-5ae7-4eca-9b2346290057d7bb/Gestational-Diabetes.pdf>

Physical activity for pregnant women



UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines. 2026

[Department of Health and Social Care, 2026](#)