

# Gestational diabetes (diabetes in pregnancy)

## What is gestational diabetes?

- Gestational diabetes is getting diabetes while you are pregnant.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are at increased risk of developing gestational diabetes, and should have a blood glucose test at 12 weeks of pregnancy.
- A further blood test is needed between 26 and 28 weeks of pregnancy.
- The hormonal changes of pregnancy on your body can result in high blood glucose (sugar) levels.
- Your body may not be able to make enough insulin or use it correctly during your pregnancy.
- This type of diabetes usually goes away after your baby is born.
- Having gestational diabetes puts you at greater risk of type 2 diabetes as you get older.

## How do I look after gestational diabetes?

- Healthy eating is very important for looking after gestational diabetes. A dietitian can help you make the best food choices.
- Regular physical activity is important. Activity helps your muscles use glucose and this helps to keep blood glucose levels in a healthy range. Strong muscles help labour and delivery too. Walking is a good choice. Talk to your doctor about the best activity for you.
- You will need to check your blood glucose levels at home. Your diabetes educator, health worker and doctor will help you with this.
- Some women may need insulin. Talk to your doctor, diabetes educator and health worker regarding safe injecting sites.
- Women with gestational diabetes are advised to see a dietitian and a diabetes educator as well as their doctor.

## Can gestational diabetes harm my baby?

- The most common effect is that the baby can grow bigger and fatter than it should. This is because the baby takes the extra glucose from the mother and stores it as fat. A large baby can make labour and delivery hard.
- Well-managed blood glucose levels can lower the risk of these problems.
- Your baby will be watched closely after birth to make sure its breathing and blood glucose levels are ok.
- Your baby also has an increased risk of type 2 diabetes later in life.



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## What should I be eating?

To look after gestational diabetes and have a healthy pregnancy, it's important to:

- Have three small meals and small snacks between meals.
- Include some carbohydrate foods at each meal and snack. Good choices are fruit or pasta or rice or noodles or bread (multigrain is better) or high fibre cereals or low fat milk or yoghurt or sweet potato or corn or potato or legumes like baked beans.
- Limit foods high in fat. Choose low fat milk and dairy foods, lean meat and skinless chicken. Try not to eat too many takeaway or processed foods.
- Avoid foods high in added sugar like soft drinks, cordials, lollies, sweets and cakes.
- A dietitian can help you to make healthy food choices for you, your baby and the rest of your family.

Involving the whole family in healthy eating and regular physical activity will reduce yours and your family's risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

## What happens after my baby is born?

Most of the time the diabetes goes away. However you are at higher risk of getting type 2 diabetes as you get older. You should have a blood test six to eight weeks and again at twelve weeks after the baby is born to see if the diabetes has completely gone. You also need to have tests for diabetes every one to two years after that to check if diabetes has developed. You can lessen your risk of getting diabetes as you get older by:

- Being physically active for at least 30 minutes on most if not all days of the week.
- Continue a healthy eating plan.
- Keeping your weight within a healthy range.
- Having your blood glucose level checked at least every two years. Every year is better.



*"Hands on Country"*  
This painting was created for Australian Diabetes Council by artist Chris Tobin, a Dharug man, and a traditional custodian in the Blue Mountains region. In the artist's words: "The central part of this painting represents the relationship of the clan – it's a unity of people looking out for each other while living independent lives."

Need more information?  
Call our customer care line on

**1300 DIABETES**  
1300 342 238



Diabetes Australia – New South Wales  
t/a Australian Diabetes Council

ABN 84 001 363 766 CHARITY NO. CFN12458

STREET ADDRESS  
26 Arundel Street  
Glebe NSW 2037

POSTAL ADDRESS  
GPO Box 9824  
Sydney NSW 2001

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CUSTOMER CARE LINE  
1300 DIABETES  
1300 342 238

FAX  
+61 2 9660 3633  
australiandiabetescouncil.com

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