

Gestational Diabetes

WHAT IS GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

Gestational diabetes is a type of diabetes that occurs during pregnancy. After the birth of the baby, the mother usually will not continue to have diabetes.

When you eat your body breaks food down into glucose and sends it into the blood. Insulin then helps move the glucose from the blood into your cells. When glucose enters your cells, it is either used as fuel for energy right away or stored for later use. In a person with gestational diabetes, there is a problem with how the insulin works.

WHAT CAUSES GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

During pregnancy, an expecting mother's placenta makes lots of hormones. Some of these hormones block insulin from moving glucose into the cells. This is called insulin resistance. All pregnant women, with or without gestational diabetes, have some insulin resistance.

To overcome this "resistance," the body makes more insulin. However, if you have gestational diabetes, your body cannot make enough insulin to keep up. Without enough insulin, the glucose in your blood rises higher than normal. This is called high blood glucose or hyperglycemia. The higher blood glucose levels can cause the fetus to gain too much weight during the pregnancy.

Although gestational diabetes is a serious condition, you can learn how to take care of it and prevent problems for you and your baby. Because the placenta leaves your body when the baby is delivered, gestational diabetes usually goes away when the baby is born.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

Gestational diabetes isn't caused by something you did or didn't do, but there are risk factors for it.

Your chances of getting gestational diabetes rise if some of the following statements are true:

- I am overweight.
- I have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes.
- My family background is African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, or Pacific Islander.
- I'm 25 years old or older.
- I've had gestational diabetes before, or I've had a baby who weighed more than 9 pounds at birth.
- My blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes (prediabetes).

If you've had gestational diabetes you have a high chance of having it again in future pregnancies and getting type 2 diabetes later on.