

Gestational Diabetes

WHAT IS GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

Gestational diabetes (GDM) is diabetes that is only present during pregnancy when you did not have diabetes before you became pregnant. After birth, GDM goes away, but you may develop type 2 diabetes right away and you are at a higher risk for developing it later in life. GDM is a condition that needs to be taken seriously, but you can learn how to manage it, taking steps to have a healthy pregnancy for you and your baby.

WHAT CAUSES GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

When you eat (or drink beverages), your body breaks food down into glucose and sends it into the blood. Insulin 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.

During pregnancy, your placenta makes a lot of hormones. Some of these hormones block insulin from moving glucose into the cells. If you have GDM, your body's insulin can't keep your blood glucose in a healthy range. This is called insulin resistance.

To make up for this "resistance," your body then makes more insulin. However, if you have GDM, your body can't make enough insulin to keep up. Without enough insulin, your blood glucose rises higher than a healthy range. This is called high blood glucose (hyperglycemia). Higher blood glucose levels can cause your baby to gain too much weight during the pregnancy.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

Your chance of getting GDM isn't caused by something you did or didn't do, but there are risk factors for it.

Your chances go up if:

- You are living with overweight or obesity.
- You have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes.
- Your family background is Black, Asian American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, or Pacific Islander.
- You're 25 years old or older.
- You've had GDM before or you've had a baby who weighed more than nine pounds at birth.
- Your blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes (prediabetes).

More handouts about this and other topics can be found at professional.diabetes.org/PatientEd