

# Gestational Diabetes

## Information for patients

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### It's OK to ask

We hope you find this leaflet helpful. It's important to know what's going on with your healthcare. If you have any questions about your treatment, just ask your medical team – they are there to support you.

You can watch a video with the information in this leaflet at [vimeo.com/556159659/44ce0534da](https://vimeo.com/556159659/44ce0534da)



### What is gestational diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition that occurs when your body doesn't produce enough of a hormone called insulin and because of this sugar starts to build up in your blood.

You have been diagnosed with a common condition called gestational diabetes which means that while you are pregnant your body isn't producing enough insulin and the amount of sugar in your blood is too high. For most women when you give birth your gestational diabetes will very likely go away. It is uncommon for women with gestational diabetes to develop permanent diabetes. We will arrange a check for you 3 months after you have had your baby to make sure you don't have permanent diabetes.

It is very important you control the level of sugar in your blood as, if it is too high, your baby will get more sugar than they need which may cause the baby to grow more than average. This increases the chance of problems in labour, needing to have a caesarean section and, a rare condition called shoulder dystocia. After birth it may also cause your baby's blood sugar levels to drop to low levels in the first few days of life. If that happens your baby may need extra care in the neonatal unit.

### What do I need to do?

A team of obstetricians, diabetes doctors and nurses, dietitians and midwives will support you to:

- **Monitor the level of sugar in your blood four times a day.**
- **Change your diet to reduce your blood sugar levels.**
- **Attend diabetes antenatal clinics** - These may be by telephone, online or face to face at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, the Western General Hospital or St John's Hospital.
- **Take medication if needed to control your blood sugar** - Metformin tablets or Insulin injections.
- **Have your baby in a hospital with access to a neonatal unit** at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh or St John's Hospital, in case your baby requires special care.

## Monitor the level of sugar in your blood four times a day

We will show you how to check your blood sugar using a finger-prick device and record this on an online app. We have asked your GP to provide the test strips and needles you will need, and these will be added to a repeat prescription for you. When you run low you will need to request another prescription.

**\*\*Contact us if your blood sugar levels are at or above these targets\*\***

Before  
breakfast



5.5mmol/L

Before lunch



6.0mmol/L

Before  
evening meal



6.0mmol/L

2hr after evening meal



7.0mmol/L

## Change your diet to help to reduce your blood sugar

Dietitians will support you with dietary and lifestyle information to help manage your blood sugar levels.

Within 7 days of your hospital appointment with your Diabetes Specialist Nurse, and receiving your blood glucose monitor, you will be contacted by telephone by the gestational diabetes Community Dietetic Service and offered a virtual appointment. This will be via a video link which you can join using your smart phone, tablet or computer.

You will be offered virtual gestational diabetes education group sessions and virtual individual follow up appointments. Your first group appointment will last for approximately 45-60 minutes. Further review appointments will last approximately 15-20 minutes and will be arranged directly with the dietitian fortnightly, or as needed.

People find online appointments are useful as there is no need to travel and you can fit appointments in around other commitments. However, if you need a face-to-face or telephone appointment, please let your dietitian know. Please let us know if you need a translator.

## Take medication if needed

If your blood sugar levels are too high and are not reducing through changes to your diet or activity, we will suggest you take medication.

- **Metformin tablets**

Metformin lowers the level of sugar in your blood by making your body more sensitive to the insulin you are already producing. It is safe and will not harm your baby. You have been supplied with Metformin tablets but **DO NOT take these** unless advised. Please keep them in a safe place at home.

Metformin can cause an upset stomach. We recommend you take it with food, as this may help reduce the symptoms. If the side effects are more than mild or do not settle, please let your doctor or diabetes team know.

- **Insulin injections**

Despite your best efforts, you may find it is not possible to control your blood sugar levels with dietary changes and metformin. In this situation we will suggest insulin injections using an 'insulin pen' that is very easy to use and almost painless.

## Having your baby

Most women give birth around their due date. As you get closer to this, the obstetric team will discuss with you the risks and benefits of vaginal birth and timing of birth. It is recommended that you have your baby in a consultant-led maternity unit.

Usually, any medications you have been taking for your gestational diabetes will be stopped when you go into labour, but your blood sugar level will be checked every 1-2 hours and, if it is higher than normal, you will be offered insulin drip for the remainder of the labour. You will be advised to have your baby's heart rate continuously monitored in labour.

After birth, your baby will stay with you unless they need extra care. It is absolutely safe to breastfeed as all medications we use are safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding. You should start feeding as soon as possible after birth and every 2-3 hours to help keep baby's blood glucose level normal.

Your baby will have a heel prick test 2-4 hours after birth to make sure their blood sugar level is not low. If it is low, your baby may simply need another feed, but occasionally they may need to be looked after in the neonatal unit for monitoring and support.

## What follow-up will I need?

For most women gestational diabetes stops immediately after giving birth, so you will be advised to stop all your diabetes medications. In some cases, you may be advised to occasionally check your blood glucose over the next few weeks and have an HbA1c test once a year.

Around 12 weeks after having your baby, you will be sent an invitation for a blood test to make sure your blood sugars have returned to normal. If your blood sugar is high, your doctor will contact you for further assessment and advice around your diet, exercise, and your weight. Having gestational diabetes increases your chances of developing type 2 diabetes in the future. Maintaining an active lifestyle and having a balanced diet can help reduce this risk.

The gestational dietetic service will invite you to a virtual wellbeing review at around 6 months after the birth of your baby. This will last approximately 15 minutes and will check on your health and identify any useful ongoing support or additional services. There are in person, virtual and digital support options e.g. The Let's Prevent Diabetes Programme, Babysteps Digital Programme and access to free weight management programmes if appropriate.

If you become pregnant again, be sure to let your midwife know you had gestational diabetes. Controlling your blood sugars during pregnancy will help reduce the risk of your baby developing obesity and diabetes in later life.

## Contact Us

If you are unwell or have any concerns about your baby call **0131 242 2657**.

**Diabetes Specialist nurses** - Monday – Friday 9am - 4pm excluding public holidays. Please leave your name, date of birth and telephone number and someone will call you back.

- **Western General Hospital – 0131 537 1746, [GDMVirtualClinic.WGH@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:GDMVirtualClinic.WGH@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk)**
- **Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh - 0131 242 1471**
- **St Johns - 01506 523 856**

**Diabetes Doctor on call** - Weekends/Out of Hours

- **Western General Hospital – 0131 537 1000**
- **Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh - 0131 537 1000**
- **St Johns - 01506 523 000**

**Gestational Diabetes Dietitians at the Astley Ainslie Hospital**

**☎ 0131 537 9169** Monday - Friday 8.00am – 5.00pm

If you need this leaflet in another format or language, please ask your medical team.



Translations



Easy read



BSL



Audio



Large print



Braille

