

What follows in this guide is for information only and is not a substitute for any guidance provided by your healthcare team.

## Your care during pregnancy

If you are diagnosed with gestational diabetes you will be assigned a healthcare team that will support you throughout your pregnancy. Your healthcare team may need to see you more often than other pregnant people without gestational diabetes. This is to support you to keep you and your baby healthy throughout your pregnancy.

You will likely be invited to attend a joint diabetes and antenatal clinic throughout the remainder of your pregnancy, if you have any questions, you should not hesitate to speak with your healthcare team.

### Your healthcare team includes:

- Specialist Diabetes Doctor
- Specialist Diabetes Nurse
- Specialist Diabetes Midwife
- Community Midwife
- Dietitian
- Obstetrician

## Gestational diabetes: steps to take

Gestational diabetes can be overwhelming at first, but this list will help guide you through the steps you can take to have a positive pregnancy.

- Learn about the condition and its treatment options
- Meet your healthcare team and understand their roles
- Request a blood glucose meter and set your goals with your healthcare team
- Apply for a Maternity Exemption Certificate from your GP or healthcare team to get free prescriptions
- Consult a Dietitian to discuss your eating and exercise habits during pregnancy
- Know who to contact if you have any questions or concerns
- Be prepared to deal with low and high blood sugar levels

- Think about your health after your pregnancy and what you can do to reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes

## Treating gestational diabetes

You may need medication to control your blood sugar levels, however, keeping active and eating a healthy balanced diet are great ways to help you control your blood sugar levels. Some find that gestational diabetes can be managed with changes to diet and exercise. for others oral agents or insulin are needed.

## Measuring blood sugar levels

If you have been diagnosed with gestational diabetes, you can get a blood sugar test kit from your healthcare team. This kit will include everything that you need to monitor your blood sugar levels and an instruction manual on how to use it. Please speak with your healthcare team if you need support in setting up and using the blood sugar equipment.

You must check your blood sugar (blood glucose) levels regularly. This is a good habit to help reduce your risk of any diabetic-related complications and help ensure that you have a healthy pregnancy. It can also help reduce the risk of low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia) and high blood sugar (hyperglycaemia), which can be harmful to you and your baby.

Sugar is your body's main source of energy and circulating sugars in the blood are usually well-regulated. In someone who has gestational diabetes, the body struggles to regulate blood sugars, so it is important to measure it every day to reduce the risk of blood sugars going too low or too high.

It is important to follow the testing regime recommended by your healthcare team.

As a general guide, most with gestational diabetes that is managed by diet and exercise, oral medications or one injection of long-acting insulin will test their blood sugar levels as follows:

### When you wake up

Measure your blood sugar levels each morning before you have anything to eat or drink. This is called your 'fasting blood sugar level'

- Below 5.3mmol/l

### After a meal

This will show you how different foods and drinks affect your blood sugars

- One hour after a meal: below 7.8mmol/l

- Two hours after a meal: below 6.4mmol/l

## Before, during and after physical activity

Where recommended by your healthcare team test your blood sugars before, during and after physical activity. This can help you decide if it is safe for you to start physical activity and understand how it affects your blood sugars.

You must speak with your healthcare team and discuss the type of physical activities you will be doing and identify how this might affect your blood sugar levels as physical activity can affect them in different ways.

### Before you begin physical activity:

- **Below 4mmol/l:** blood sugar levels are too low, have your usual hypoglycaemia treatment, wait 15 minutes and check your blood sugar levels again
- **4-7mmol/l:** this is the healthy range; however, you may need a snack with starchy carbs before you start so your blood sugar levels do not go too low
- **7-13mmol/l:** you can begin your activity as your blood sugar levels will generally come down during activity. If you are unsure, speak with your healthcare team
- **Above 13mmol/l:** this is too high, speak with your healthcare team before taking part in physical activity

### During and after physical activity:

If at any time you begin to feel unwell during/after physical activity, check your blood sugar levels right away and seek urgent help.

- **During and after:** check your levels to ensure that they are within the healthy range. If they have dropped too low (below 4mmol/l) have your usual hypoglycaemia treatment

## Whenever you feel unwell or have symptoms of low or high blood glucose

Whenever you feel unwell or have symptoms of low or high blood glucose, it is important to take action and particularly with hyperglycaemia seek urgent help. It is also a good idea to tell your friends, family and others you are around about your gestational diabetes and specifically how to support you if your blood sugars are low or high.

## Low blood sugar levels (hypoglycaemia)

If your blood sugar levels are too low (usually below 4 mmol/l), you should take immediate action to raise your blood sugars. If left untreated you could experience hypoglycaemia (low blood sugars), which could cause your blood sugars to drop further and lead to severe hypoglycaemia.

Not everyone with gestational diabetes experiences hypoglycaemia, but it's more likely if you are taking insulin.

## Signs and symptoms of low blood sugar levels

If you experience any of the following symptoms you must check your blood sugar levels immediately:

- Feeling shaky or disorientated
- Sweating
- Being anxious or irritable
- Going pale
- Palpitations and a fast pulse
- Lips feeling tingly
- Blurred vision
- Being hungry
- Feeling tearful
- Tiredness
- Having a headache
- Lack of concentration

## Treating a 'hypo'

Treat immediately by eating or drinking (15g) of a fast-acting carbohydrate, and then rechecking your blood glucose levels in 15 minutes. This is called the '15/15 rule'.

### Examples include:

- Five glucose or dextrose tablets
- Four jelly babies
- A small glass of a sugary (non-diet) drink (150-200ml)
- A small carton of pure fruit juice (200ml)
- Two tubes of a glucose gel (e.g., GlucoGel®)
- Glucose juice (e.g., Lift Shots)

After experiencing hypoglycaemia, you may need to eat or drink 15 to 20g of a slower-acting carb to stop your sugar levels from going down again. This could be a sandwich, a piece of fruit, cereal or milk. Do not treat hypoglycaemia with high-fat foods even if they have a lot

of sugar such as chocolate or cakes. This is because the fat will slow down the digestion of the sugar.

## Reduce your risk of hypoglycaemia

To reduce your risk of experiencing hypoglycaemia, you can:

- Eat regular meals
- Eat a balanced diet
- Check your blood sugar levels before, during and after exercise
- Take your medications as recommended by your health care team and GP
- Avoid alcohol (it is also not recommended to consume alcohol during pregnancy)
- Perform stress relieving activities
- Take extra care during extreme changes in weather
- Follow our top tips for taking care of yourself if you are unwell

## High blood sugar levels (hyperglycaemia)

Usually, there are no visible symptoms for slightly high blood sugar levels. However, if your blood sugar levels go too high you might start to feel more lethargic and fatigued and experience headaches.

Generally, your blood sugar is too high if it is, above 5.3mmol/l fasting, above 7.8mmol/l one hour after a meal, or above 6.4mmol/l two hours after a meal.

## Signs and symptoms of high blood sugar levels

If you experience any of the following signs or symptoms, you should check your blood sugar levels:

- Passing more urine than normal, especially at night
- Being very thirsty
- Tiredness and lethargy
- Thrush or other recurring bladder and skin infections
- Headaches
- Blurred vision
- Weight loss
- Feeling sick

## Treating hyperglycaemia

Doing some physical activity like housework, going for a walk and drinking plenty of sugar-free fluids can help bring down your blood sugar levels. If you notice your blood sugar levels are too high daily, you should speak with your healthcare team for advice and to gain support.

## Reduce your risk of hyperglycaemia

- Test your blood sugar levels regularly and as recommended by your healthcare team
- Eat healthier forms of carbohydrates
- Avoid food and drinks high in sugars
- Keep active throughout the day
- Take your medication as prescribed
- Take care of your wellbeing

## Very high blood sugar levels

Very high blood sugar levels can be dangerous. If your blood sugar level is 15 mmol/l or more, you may be at risk of diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). Call 111 immediately for support.

## Managing gestational diabetes when you are sick

Here are some of our top tips to help you manage your gestational diabetes during times when you are unwell:

- **First, check your blood sugars:** it is important that when you are feeling unwell you check your blood sugars. This will help you understand whether you are ill or if your blood sugars are too low or high
- **Keep taking your diabetes medications:** generally, you should keep taking any medication for your gestational diabetes if you are unwell. However, you may need to reduce or stop taking some medications. Speak with your healthcare team for further guidance
- **Adjust your insulin:** If you are on insulin to control gestational diabetes you may need to adjust your insulin dose if unwell. Speak with your healthcare team for specific advice on this
- **Check blood sugars more often:** you may need to check your blood sugar levels more frequently, check with your healthcare team what changes you may need to make to your testing regime

- **Stay hydrated:** you might not want to drink any water while you are ill, but you must aim for 6-8 glasses of water or unsweetened fluids per day. If you are struggling to stay hydrated, you must speak to your healthcare team
- **Eat little and often:** you might not want to eat or find it hard to keep food down, especially large meals. You could try eating/drinking a few snacks high in carbohydrates to help control your blood sugar levels such as jellybeans, fruit juice, or sucking on a glucose tablet

### Diabetes UK

#### Guide to gestational diabetes

<http://tinyurl.com/yxcjudxp>

#### Treating gestational diabetes

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/diabetes-the-basics/gestational-diabetes/treatments>

#### Managing when you are unwell

<http://tinyurl.com/y6zy7k3r>

#### Hyperglycaemia information

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/complications/hypers#treat>

#### Hypoglycaemia information

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/complications/hypos>

#### Blood sugar levels and physical activity

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/managing-your-diabetes/exercise/blood-sugar-levels>

#### Measuring blood sugar levels

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/managing-your-diabetes/testing#glucose>

### NHS

#### Gestation diabetes information

<https://www.hey.nhs.uk/patient-leaflet/gestational-diabetes-mellitus-gdm/>