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HAVE GESTATIONAL DIABETES? HERE'S HOW YOU SHOULD EAT



While most women need to be careful about their diets, others have to be especially careful not to develop gestational diabetes.

I'm on the crusade to fight diabetes in all of us, but I'm especially concerned about women with gestational diabetes because their babies are automatically at risk for developing diabetes related issues down the line. And we don't want that!

HOW DID I GET GESTATIONAL DIABETES?

While doctors still aren't sure how gestational diabetes develops, they know that if you have high blood sugar while you're pregnant, you probably have it.

Insulin is the hormone responsible for getting sugar out of the blood and inside the cells. Our bodies can typically regulate the amount of insulin it needs to produce to get sugar out of the bloodstream and into the cells. But during gestational diabetes, the hormones in the placenta that help the baby develop properly also block insulin from working in mommy's body – causing insulin resistance.

So instead of getting moved into the cells, all this sugar becomes stuck outside the cells, creating high blood sugar levels, or hyperglycemia.

HOW DOES GESTATIONAL DIABETES AFFECT BABIES?

Diabetic women who become pregnant are at higher risk of developing birth defects. But since gestational diabetes only affects the baby after it's been formed, but is still growing, the risk becomes macrosomia, or "fat" baby.

During gestational diabetes, mom's pancreas has to work harder to produce more insulin to get rid of all the sugar in the blood that the cells are not absorbing. The placenta doesn't absorb insulin, but it does let sugar pass through. This extra sugar goes right to the baby.

When the baby develops high blood sugar levels, the baby's pancreas starts to produce additional insulin to eliminate all the extra sugar in the blood, just like mom's does.

As if being called a fat baby isn't bad enough, babies with macrosomia either have very low blood sugar levels or very high blood sugar levels when they're born. Babies with low blood sugar levels face higher risk of breathing problems. On the other hand, babies with excess insulin become at risk for obesity and type 2 diabetes as they get older.

DOES GESTATIONAL DIABETES GO AWAY?

Gestational diabetes usually goes away after pregnancy, but your “chances are 2 in 3 that it will return in future pregnancies”.

Sometimes women don't know they have type 2 diabetes until they become pregnant and get diagnosed with gestational diabetes. Doctors will have to monitor these women to see if their blood sugar levels return to normal after pregnancy before they can be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes for sure.

However, an unfortunate connection seems to be that if you had gestational diabetes, you're more prone to developing type 2 diabetes down the line, unless you modify your food choices and activity level.

HOW TO TREAT GESTATIONAL DIABETES

Mom, you're going to need to keep those blood sugar levels the same as pregnant women who don't face this issue, which means you're going to need to work extra hard to eat healthy and exercise regularly.

Eating whole, unprocessed foods will not only keep your blood sugar in check, but will set you up for avoiding diabetes in the future.

Did you know that including regular exercise fights insulin resistance?

Your doctor may also want you to start checking your blood sugar levels to make sure you're always on the right path. The American Diabetes Association suggests women with gestational diabetes keep within these blood sugar ranges:

- ✓ Before a meal (preprandial): 95 mg/dl or less
- ✓ 1-hour after a meal (postprandial): 140 mg/dl or less
- ✓ 2-hours after a meal (postprandial): 120 mg/dl or less
- ✓ Let's talk about what you should eat to control your gestational diabetes.

GOOD FOODS FOR GESTATIONAL DIABETES

You need to make sure you're getting healthy amounts of macronutrients such as carbs, proteins, and fats.

While all of these macronutrients affect your blood sugar over the course of a few hours, only carbs work quickly to raise your blood sugar levels because when they're digested they turn into sugar.

Combining carbs and protein for three meals and two or three snacks every day will be a good way to keep your blood sugar levels from fluctuating too much. Remember, you need to eat a balanced diet not only for you, but for your baby. If you don't have gestational diabetes, you can be less strict, but it's still important to eat healthy regardless.

Most meals should include complex carbs, protein, veggies, and fat.

HOW TO WATCH YOUR CARBS

Most experts recommend against low-carb diets for pregnant women. You and your baby need the right kinds of carbs to ensure proper health and nutrition. Carbs help with digestion, brain functioning, and keeping us feeling full so we don't overeat.

Complex carbs are made from unprocessed sources and digest slower (think whole wheat bread, quinoa, and oats). Simple carbs, which are typically more processed and commercially sweetened, generally cause faster spikes in blood sugar levels. This doesn't mean they're bad, but they can be more problematic if you already have gestational diabetes.

All carbohydrates will affect your blood sugar levels, but at different rates, which is why it's important to emphasize complex carbs most of the time.

Here's a list of foods that contain carbs:

- ✓ Milk and yogurt
- ✓ Fruits and juices
- ✓ Rice, grains, cereals, and pasta
- ✓ Breads, tortillas, crackers, bagels, and rolls
- ✓ Dried beans, split peas, and lentils
- ✓ Potatoes, corn, yams, peas, and winter squash
- ✓ Desserts, honey, syrups, pastries, cookies, soda, and candy

A good starting place is to have two to three servings of carbs during breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Make sure you're counting all the carbs (including carbs from milk and veggies) when you tally up these servings.

MAKE SURE TO EAT YOUR (NON-STARCHY) VEGGIES & FRUIT

Veggies provide you and your baby with vitamins and nutrients that are critical for maintaining a healthy diet, plus they have fiber to help slow the absorption of carbohydrates. And in fact, vegetables are a source of carbohydrate as well.

Try to aim for at least 5 or more servings of veggies and a small amount of fruit every day. One serving of veggies is equivalent to ½ cup cooked, 1 cup raw, or 2 cups raw leafy veggies.

While most veggies don't affect blood sugar levels, moms with gestational diabetes should be mindful of starchier varieties of vegetables.

These veggies include:

- ✓ Beans
- ✓ Corn
- ✓ Peas
- ✓ Potatoes
- ✓ Yams

EAT PLENTY OF PROTEIN

Protein is so important for you and your baby because it helps your hormones (like insulin) work better and it helps repair and build new cells.

You should aim to have protein with both your meals and your snacks. When you eat protein with carbs, the protein helps control blood sugar levels by slowing the digestion of the carbs. Protein also helps you feel fuller longer.

Some healthy protein choices include:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| ✓ Lean beef | ✓ Lamb |
| ✓ Low fat cheese | ✓ Nuts |
| ✓ Chicken | ✓ Nut butters |
| ✓ Cottage cheese | ✓ Pork |
| ✓ Eggs | ✓ Tempeh |
| ✓ Egg substitute | ✓ Tofu |
| ✓ Fish and seafood (watch out
for mercury levels) | ✓ Turkey |

HEALTHY FATS ARE YOUR FRIEND...REALLY

Make sure to get enough healthy fat in your gestational diet. Fats are essential for hormone production and ensuring a healthily developed baby.

Plus, if you didn't eat fat, your body would have a harder time absorbing vitamins A, D, E, and K from your fruits and veggies.

Make sure to include healthy fats in your diet such as:

- ✓ Avocado
- ✓ Healthy cooking oils (avocado, olive, macadamia)
- ✓ Nut butters (almond, peanut, cashew)
- ✓ Fatty fish (salmon, trout, sardines)
- ✓ Nuts and seeds (almonds, chia, hemp hearts)

MEAL PLANNING FOR GESTATIONAL DIABETES

Without a doubt, meal planning can be especially helpful for combating gestational diabetes.

Breakfast

Having a small breakfast with protein, carbs, and fat can be helpful for balancing blood sugar levels.

Eating fruits, fruit juices, milk, or simple carbs like cereals can exacerbate your high blood sugar levels. Instead, aim to eat complex carbohydrates, one or two servings of protein, and lots of non-starchy veggies.

Here are some great breakfast ideas that include protein, veggies, and a bit of fat:

- ✓ Broccoli and cheese omelet with 1 slice whole wheat toast
- ✓ Scrambled eggs with tomato, 1/2 English muffin
- ✓ 1 cup old fashioned oatmeal with 1/2 diced apple, 2 tablespoons sliced almonds, and cinnamon
- ✓ 1 small protein pancake and 1/2 cup low-fat cottage cheese
- ✓ 1 slice pumpernickel toast with almond butter

Lunch

Continue to fuel your body through the rest of the day by aiming for another serving of complex carbohydrates at lunch. Make sure to eat some veggies to keep you full until your next snack, but you can include all sources of healthy carbs, including veggies, in your carb count.

Here are some of my favorite work-ready lunches to take with you:

- ✓ Curried Chicken Salad
- ✓ Whole wheat Greek turkey wrap with kale or spinach, low-fat feta cheese, tomatoes, and cucumber, with cherries on the side
- ✓ Lettuce wrap filled with chicken, avocado, and cheese, and 1 small mandarin
- ✓ My avocado egg salad on cloud bread, plus 1 medium plum

- ✔ "Mix together some cooked quinoa, white beans, chopped bell pepper, carrots and broccoli to make a grain salad. Toss with some olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Add a nectarine or some grapes on the side and a small handful of dry roasted almonds, if desired".

Dinner

I like making extra servings of whatever I'm eating for dinner so I can take it to work the next day.

Here are some easy go-to's:

- ✔ 4 oz. fish, 2/3 cup couscous, 1/2 cup cooked green beans, 1 cup cut-up melon
- ✔ 1/2 cup whole wheat pasta with a simple tomato sauce, turkey meatballs, 1 cup salad
- ✔ Spaghetti squash with mushrooms and Gruyere cheese, 1 slice whole wheat garlic bread, 1 small peach
- ✔ Veggie chili, 1 small potato, 1 1/4 cup whole strawberries
- ✔ Skinless rotisserie chicken breast over salad with low-fat cheese, pecans, and dried cranberries

Snacks

Eating something every few hours can be a good way to stay full and keep your blood sugar levels stable if you have gestational diabetes.

Try to snack between breakfast and lunch, and then again between lunch and dinner.

Here are some tasty snack ideas:

- ✓ Half a banana with almond butter and hemp hearts
- ✓ 1 oz cheese, 1 small nectarine, and 2 tablespoons walnuts
- ✓ 1 cup of plain low-fat Greek yogurt, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup berries, and chia seeds
- ✓ 1 hard boiled egg, baby carrots, and a cheese stick
- ✓ Tomato, fresh basil, low-fat mozzarella, and olives drizzled in olive oil

FINAL THOUGHTS

Gestational diabetes doesn't have to cast a shadow on what should be the most exciting time in a soon-to-be mother's life. With a little planning and a lot of dedication, you'll be able to stay healthy, satisfied, and happy throughout the course of your pregnancy.

Learn how to eat nutritious meals and exercise, and you'll set a good example for your children. You'll be an awesome healthy role model and we need more of those!

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