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Gestational diabetes

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Overview

Gestational diabetes is diabetes that's first diagnosed during pregnancy. Pregnancy sometimes is called gestation. Like other types of diabetes, gestational diabetes affects how the body's cells use sugar, also called glucose. Gestational diabetes causes high blood sugar that can affect a pregnancy and a baby's health.

The good news is that you may be able to control gestational diabetes. Eat healthy foods, exercise and, if needed, take medicine. Controlling blood sugar can help keep you and your baby healthy, and it may help prevent some problems during delivery.

For most people who have gestational diabetes, blood sugar goes back to its usual level soon after a baby is born. But if you've had gestational diabetes, you may be at increased risk for type 2 diabetes later in life.

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Symptoms

Most of the time, gestational diabetes doesn't cause symptoms that are easy to notice. Being thirsty and urinating more often are possible symptoms.

When to see a doctor

If possible, seek healthcare when you start to think about trying to get pregnant. Then your healthcare professional can check your risk of gestational diabetes and your overall wellness. Once you're pregnant, your healthcare professional will check you for gestational diabetes as part of your prenatal care.

If you have gestational diabetes, you'll need checkups more often. These extra checkups are most likely to be during the last three months of pregnancy. Your healthcare professional will check your blood sugar level and your baby's health.

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Causes

Experts don't yet know why some people get gestational diabetes and others don't. Extra weight before pregnancy often plays a role.

Hormones, mainly insulin, keep blood sugar at the right level in the body. But during pregnancy, hormone levels change. Those changes may make it harder for the body to use blood sugar as it should. This makes blood sugar rise.

Risk factors

Risk factors for gestational diabetes include:

- Being overweight or obese.
- Not being physically active.
- Having prediabetes.
- Having had gestational diabetes during an earlier pregnancy.
- Having a hormone condition called polycystic ovary syndrome.

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- Being of a certain race or ethnicity, such as Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Asian.

Complications

If high blood sugar isn't controlled, it can cause health problems for you and your baby. This includes an increased risk of needing surgery to deliver the baby. That surgery is called a C-section.

Complications that may affect your baby

If you have gestational diabetes, your baby may be at higher risk of:

- **High birth weight.** If your blood sugar level is high, it may cause your baby to grow too large. Babies who weigh 9 pounds or more are more likely to become stuck in the birth canal, have birth injuries or need a C-section delivery.
- **Early birth.** High blood sugar may raise the risk of labor and delivery before your pregnancy due date. This is called preterm birth. Or you could need an early delivery because the baby is large.
- **Trouble breathing.** Babies born early may have a condition that makes breathing hard, called respiratory distress syndrome.
- **Low blood sugar.** Sometimes babies have low blood sugar, called hypoglycemia, shortly after birth. Severe hypoglycemia may cause seizures. Being fed right away and sometimes getting glucose through a vein can raise the baby's blood sugar level.
- **Obesity and type 2 diabetes later in life.** Babies have a higher risk of being obese and having type 2 diabetes later in life.
- **Stillbirth.** Gestational diabetes that is not treated could result in a baby's death either before or shortly after birth.

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- **High blood pressure and preeclampsia.** Gestational diabetes raises the risk of high blood pressure. It also raises the risk of a serious complication of pregnancy that causes high blood pressure and other symptoms, called preeclampsia. These conditions can threaten your life and your baby's life.
- **Having a surgical delivery.** You're more likely to have a C-section if you have gestational diabetes.
- **Future diabetes.** If you have gestational diabetes, you're more likely to get it again during a future pregnancy. You also have a higher risk of getting type 2 diabetes as you get older.

Prevention

There is no sure way to prevent gestational diabetes. But having healthy habits before pregnancy can help. If you've had gestational diabetes, these healthy choices also might lower your risk of getting diabetes again. That includes developing gestational diabetes during another pregnancy and developing type 2 diabetes in the future.

- **Eat healthy foods.** Choose a variety of foods high in fiber and low in fat and calories. Focus on fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Eat healthy portion sizes.
- **Keep active.** Exercising before and during pregnancy can help protect you from getting gestational diabetes. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week. Take a brisk daily walk. Ride a bike. Swim laps.

Short bursts of activity add up. These might include parking further away from the store when you run errands or taking short walks throughout the day.

- **Start pregnancy at a healthy weight.** If you're planning to get pregnant, losing extra weight before you do may help you have a healthy pregnancy. Make lasting changes to your eating habits, such as eating more vegetah Close

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