

Gestational diabetes

HEALTHY EATING DURING PREGNANCY



Eating a healthy diet is an important part of taking care of your gestational diabetes during pregnancy. Following a meal plan created by your registered dietitian can help you have a healthy pregnancy.

What are carbohydrates? Why are they important?

Carbohydrates are nutrients that come from milk, yogurt, grains, fruits, and starchy vegetables. Desserts and sweets also contain carbohydrates, but often contain very little nutrition value.

Carbohydrates are your body's fuel source (like gas for a car). Most of the carbohydrate you eat is broken down into blood sugar and absorbed into the blood stream. When blood sugar levels go up, your pancreas produces insulin. Insulin helps move the sugar into your cells where it can be used for energy, and the blood sugar level returns to normal.

In women with gestational diabetes, there is not enough insulin or the insulin is not working normally. The underlying problem is with the insulin – not the carbohydrate.

What can I do to have a healthy baby?

- Eat three meals and two to four snacks, 2 to 3 hours apart. Avoid skipping meals or snacks.
- The current recommendation is to eat a minimum of 12 carbohydrate servings per day during pregnancy. Some women with gestational diabetes may need to eat fewer carbohydrates than they did before they were pregnant. Some women may need to eat more. Your dietitian will design a meal plan that meets your nutritional needs and fits your lifestyle.
- Try a 10- to 20-minute walk after meals – it helps lower blood sugar.

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Things to remember

- Both the type and amount of carbohydrate affect your blood sugar level. However, the total amount of carbohydrate consumed is the biggest predictor of what your blood sugar will be when you check it two hours after eating.
- Because blood glucose levels tend to be higher in the early morning, carbohydrate servings may need to be limited at breakfast to one to two servings.
- It is not unusual for women with gestational diabetes to experience some weight loss after beginning their meal plan.
- Foods with added sugars often provide very little nutrition. If you do include sweet foods in your food plan, limit yourself to a small portion, such as 15 grams of carbohydrate. Remember to substitute it for another carbohydrate choice in your plan.
- There is limited research on non-nutritive sweetener use during pregnancy. While some artificial sweeteners are considered safe to use during pregnancy, most providers recommend limiting their use.

Recommended amounts of carbohydrate foods during pregnancy

- **Fruits:** 2 to 3 servings per day. Choose whole fruit instead of juice when possible. Serving size: approximately ½ cup.
- **Grains, beans, and starchy vegetables:** 6 or more servings each day. Look for whole-grain and high-fiber foods. Serving size: 1 slice of loaf bread or ½ cup of corn.
- **Milk and yogurt:** 3 to 4 servings each day. Look for low-fat or nonfat choices. Serving size: 1 cup.
- **Sweets:** Keep portions small. Count the carbs. Serving size: varies.

Recommended amounts of noncarbohydrate foods during pregnancy

- **Nonstarchy vegetables:** 3 or more servings each day. Choose a variety of colors and types.
- **Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, and other protein foods:** 5-6 ounces each day. Choose lean meats and low-fat cheeses.
- **Fats:** Choose healthier fats (fats from plants). Limit saturated fats (fat from animals).

For more information

Please watch an online video on healthy eating and gestational diabetes. Go to kp.org/video, click on Videos, then on “Diabetes: Healthy Habits During Pregnancy.” The 25-minute video is divided into 10 sections.