

Diabetes in Pregnancy

Having diabetes means that you have too much glucose, a form of sugar, in your blood.

Some women may develop diabetes during pregnancy. This is called gestational diabetes. This health problem often goes away after giving birth.

Any woman can get gestational diabetes. But certain things can raise your risk for it, such as: Being 25 years or older at first pregnancy; Being overweight before becoming pregnant; Having a family history of diabetes; Having already had a baby that weighed more than 9 pounds at birth; Being African American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or Native American.

Diabetes affects the way your body uses the food you eat. To understand gestational diabetes, let's look at how your body changes food into energy. Most of the food you eat changes to glucose. This is also called blood sugar.

Glucose enters the bloodstream, causing your blood sugar level to rise. As your blood sugar rises, the pancreas releases insulin. Insulin works like a key. It opens the cells and lets glucose in. The glucose is used for energy right away or stored for later use.

Because this process removes glucose from your blood, insulin helps keep your blood glucose level in a healthy range. During pregnancy, your placenta supplies your baby with glucose, oxygen, and other nutrients. Your placenta also makes certain hormones that your body needs for a healthy pregnancy.

As your baby and placenta grow and develop, more hormones are made. By months 6 through 9 of your pregnancy, this rise in hormones can cause your cells to stop letting insulin do its job. This is called insulin resistance.

To balance insulin resistance, the pancreas needs to make more and more insulin to move glucose out of the blood and into the cells for energy. In fact, the amount of insulin you need may rise by 2 to 3 times during pregnancy.

Most women make enough extra insulin to keep their blood glucose level in a healthy range. But if your cells resist the insulin, they can't open to let the glucose in. Glucose then stays in your blood, leading to gestational diabetes.

Most women are tested for gestational diabetes between weeks 24 and 28. For the test, you will drink a special glucose drink. One hour after you finish the drink, your blood will be drawn to check your glucose levels.

If the screening test shows a high glucose level, your healthcare provider will give you an oral glucose tolerance test. This test checks your blood glucose levels over a 3-hour period. If the results are still high, you have gestational diabetes.

If you get diabetes during your pregnancy, work closely with your healthcare provider to learn how to keep your blood glucose in a healthy range. Doing so will help prevent serious complications for you and your baby.