



STATESBORO WOMEN'S HEALTH SPECIALISTS

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Gestational diabetes can cause a range of complications during pregnancy. Fortunately, a woman can help reduce complications by following a healthful diet. Gestational diabetes occurs if a woman's body cannot produce enough insulin, during her pregnancy. This deficiency leads to high blood sugar. High blood sugar levels may cause problems for the woman and her baby if not managed properly.

This type of diabetes occurs when a woman's body cannot make enough of the hormone insulin. Insulin is made by the pancreas and helps the body's cells to use sugar from the blood as energy. When a woman is pregnant, her body will produce more hormones, and she may put on weight. Both of these changes may mean that her body's cells may not use insulin as well as they used to. This is called insulin resistance.

Becoming resistant to insulin means that the body needs more of it in order to use up the sugar in the blood. Sometimes a woman's body cannot produce enough insulin to keep up. This leads to a sugar buildup in the blood, resulting in high blood sugar levels.

Symptoms of gestational diabetes may include:

- being unusually thirsty
- urinating frequently
- tiredness
- nausea
- frequent bladder infections
- blurred vision
- sugar in urine, when tested for by a doctor

Foods to eat

High blood sugar levels may be harmful to the woman and the growing fetus. To help manage blood sugar levels, it is important to monitor how many, what type, and how often carbohydrates are consumed. Keeping a food diary may make this easier.

Monitoring carbohydrates

Eating complex carbs rather than simple carbs is recommended.

Spacing meals and snacks containing carbohydrates evenly throughout the day can help avoid spikes in blood sugar. The American Diabetes Association recommend that women with gestational diabetes should eat three small-to-moderate meals and two to four snacks per day.

Other ways to help regulate blood sugar include:

- avoiding eating too many carbohydrates at one time
- sticking to complex carbohydrates that are high in fiber
- combining carbohydrates with protein or healthy fat
- not skipping meals
- eating a protein-rich and fibrous carbohydrate breakfast

Eating foods that have a low glycemic load is another crucial factor in a gestational diabetes diet. The glycemic load is calculated by multiplying the grams of carbohydrate in a serving of a particular type of food by that food's glycemic index (GI). This number gives a more accurate picture of a food's real impact on blood sugar.

Foods with a low glycemic load are broken down more slowly than simple carbohydrates, which are typically considered high GI foods. A glycemic load of 10 or below is considered low and is ideal for those with gestational diabetes who are trying to manage blood sugar.

Low glycemic load foods to eat include:

- 100 percent wholegrain breads and cereals
- non-starchy vegetables
- some starchy vegetables, such as peas and carrots
- some fruit, such as apples, oranges, grapefruit, peaches, and pears
- beans
- lentils
- chickpeas

All of these low GI foods release sugar into the blood slowly, helping to keep blood sugar levels stable.

Eating protein alongside carbohydrates, or choosing carbohydrates that also have protein in them, helps to balance blood sugar levels. Women with gestational diabetes should try to eat lean, protein-rich foods, such as:

- fish, chicken, and turkey
- eggs
- tofu
- beans
- nuts
- seeds
- quinoa
- legumes

Eat unsaturated fats as part of any healthful diet. Examples of unsaturated fats include:

- olive oil
- peanut oil
- avocado
- most nuts and seeds
- salmon
- sardines
- tuna
- chia seeds

Avoid sugary foods and drinks that may raise blood sugar levels is essential if a person is following a gestational diabetes diet.

Blood sugar levels are raised when people eat sugary foods, particularly those that are refined and processed. Women with gestational diabetes are advised to avoid or limit sugary foods, as much as possible.

Sugary foods to avoid include:

- cakes
- biscuits
- sweets
- puddings
- soda
- fruit juice with added sugar

Avoid starchy foods, which are high in carbohydrates and have a bigger impact on our blood sugar, so it is important to eat them only in small portions. Some very starchy foods are best avoided or limited. These include:

- white potatoes
- white bread
- white rice
- white pasta

Avoiding hidden sugars and carbohydrates

Some foods are not obviously sources of sugar or carbohydrate, but they may still contain unhealthful levels of both of these food types. Examples of these include:

- highly processed foods
- some condiments, such as dressings and ketchup
- fast foods
- alcohol

Milk and fruits contain natural sugars and can be enjoyed in moderation.

Treatment

Following a healthful diet and exercising regularly can both help control blood sugar levels and manage gestational diabetes. However, this is not sufficient to control the condition for every woman affected.

Blood sugar levels depend on the individual. Some women with gestational diabetes may need medication, such as metformin or insulin to lower their blood sugar levels.

Complications

If a woman has gestational diabetes during pregnancy, this increases the risk of both her and her child experiencing complications.

Babies of women who have gestational diabetes are at a greater risk of:

- weighing more than 9 pounds, making delivery harder
- being born early
- having low blood sugar
- developing type 2 diabetes as an adult

For the woman, potential complications include having high blood pressure and having a larger baby. Giving birth to a larger baby can increase the risk of excessive bleeding and the need for a cesarean section.

About half of women with gestational diabetes go on to develop type 2 diabetes after pregnancy. Managing blood sugar levels during pregnancy reduces the risk of this happening.

What foods should you eat?

Basic healthy eating

- 1 Eat protein with every meal.
- 2 Include daily fruits and vegetables in your diet.
- 3 Thirty percent or less of your diet should be made up of fat.
- 4 Limit or avoid processed foods.
- 5 Pay attention to portion sizes to avoid overeating.

If you have gestational diabetes, maintaining a healthy, balanced diet may help you manage your symptoms without needing medication. In general, your diet should include protein plus the right mix of carbohydrates and fats.

Once you are diagnosed with gestational diabetes, ask your doctor about working with a registered dietitian or nutritionist. They can help you plan your meals and come up with an eating plan that will keep you and your baby healthy. Aim to base your meals around protein. Include lots of fresh foods and limit your intake of carbohydrates and processed foods.

The American Diabetes Association has a helpful guide called MyPlate to help you learn how to build a healthy plate for each meal. For example, each meal should be 25 percent protein, 25 percent starch, and 50 percent non starchy foods, such as vegetables or salad. Here are few healthy choices for snacks and meals if you have gestational diabetes:

- fresh or frozen vegetables
- eggs or egg whites
- steel-cut oatmeal topped with berries
- fresh fruit
- skinless chicken breasts
- baked fish
- steamed vegetables
- air-popped popcorn
- unsweetened Greek yogurt