Healthy Eating for Diabetes in Pregnancy
Information for patients, relatives and carers

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Introduction

This booklet has been designed to help you manage your diabetes in pregnancy. You may already have diabetes, or you may have developed diabetes during your pregnancy (also known as gestational diabetes).

Diabetes is a condition where the body cannot control the level of sugar (glucose) in the blood.

Insulin is a hormone that removes sugar from the blood and takes it to where it is needed in the body for energy. Without enough insulin, the blood sugar level rises.

Gestational diabetes is a form of diabetes which occurs during pregnancy. Due to the effects of pregnancy hormones, your insulin may not be working properly and so the blood sugar level rises. Gestational diabetes will often go away once the baby has been born.

Raised blood sugar levels during pregnancy can be harmful for you and your baby. It is important that you follow the advice from your dietitian and diabetes team to help you control your blood sugar levels.
What is the dietary treatment for diabetes in pregnancy?

You should follow your dietary recommendations during pregnancy and after your baby has been born. If you developed gestational diabetes, this advice may help to reduce your risk of developing diabetes in the long term.

Dietary treatment is based on a healthy eating plan. In addition to this, you should focus on carbohydrate foods to help manage your blood sugar levels.

**Healthy Eating**

- **Fruit and vegetables**
- **Bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta, rice**
- **Meat, fish, eggs and alternative**
- **Milk and dairy foods**
- **Foods and drinks high in sugar and/or fat**
What are carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates are the only food group that can be broken down to glucose (sugar) in the bowel after you have eaten them. This means that they are the only food group that will cause your blood sugar levels to rise.

Carbohydrates are an essential part of the diet and should be included at regular intervals across the day.

There are two types of carbohydrate:

1. **Sugary foods and drinks** cause your blood sugar level to rise very quickly, making your diabetes more difficult to manage. It is for this reason that we encourage you to choose low sugar alternatives.

2. **Starchy foods** will be broken down more slowly in the bowel and cause your blood glucose to rise more slowly after a meal. This helps to keep your blood sugar level more stable across the day.

Starchy foods include:

Breads, cereals, potatoes, pasta, rice, noodles, crackers, grains (cous cous and bulgar wheat), pastries, pizza bases, breaded or battered foods and pulses (baked beans, kidney beans, lentils and chick peas).
## Reducing sugary foods and drinks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sugary food and drink</th>
<th>Low sugar alternatives</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sugar, sucrose, glucose</td>
<td>Low calorie artificial sweeteners e.g. Splenda, Canderel, Hermesetas, Saccharin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fizzy pop and full sugar cordial, Lucozade and energy drinks</td>
<td>Diet, low calorie and sugar free versions. No added sugar squash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweets</td>
<td>Fresh fruit for snacks. Sugar free mints/sweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey, syrup, treacle, jam, marmalade</td>
<td>Reduced sugar or low sugar jam or marmalade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar-coated/sweetened breakfast cereals e.g. Sugar Puffs, Frosties, Crunchy Nut Cornflakes</td>
<td>Plain breakfast cereals e.g. Branflakes, Shredded Wheat, Porridge, no added sugar Muesli, All Bran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugary food and drink</td>
<td>Low sugar alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweet biscuits, chocolate biscuits, cakes and sweet pastries, chocolates</td>
<td>Plain biscuits e.g. Rich Tea, Morning Coffee, digestive, Garibaldi, ginger biscuits, fig rolls. Small amounts of plain cake, scone, fruit bread or teacake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinned fruit in syrup</td>
<td>Fresh fruit, tinned fruit in natural juice. Small amounts of dried fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit yoghurts containing sugar/low fat yoghurts</td>
<td>Diet/healthy/light yoghurts e.g. Ski Light, Shape, Muller Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desserts, whips and mousses containing sugar. Jelly</td>
<td>Sugar free whips, sugar free jelly</td>
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**Diabetic products** are not recommended as they are expensive and may cause some stomach cramps and diarrhoea.
Slowly digested foods

Some starchy foods are digested in the bowel more slowly than others. By choosing more slowly digested foods, this helps to keep your blood glucose level more steady after a meal.

Some slowly digested foods include:

- Granary, seeded, multigrain or soya and linseed bread
- Pasta
- Basmati rice or quick cook rice
- Sweet potatoes
- Pulses – baked beans, lentils, chick peas and kidney beans
- Porridge oats, All Bran, Special K
- All fruit – fresh or tinned in natural juice
Portion sizes

All carbohydrate foods will eventually turn into glucose (sugar) and enter the blood stream. It is therefore important to look at how much carbohydrate is being consumed at any one time.

By decreasing the amount of carbohydrate in your diet, you can lower your blood glucose levels. However, it is important not to cut these foods out of your diet completely.

Instead, try to eat similar amounts of carbohydrate at each meal, which will help to keep your blood sugar at a steady level across the day. A sample menu has been provided to help you achieve this.
**Sample menu plan**

**Breakfast**

- One medium slice of granary or seeded bread with olive based spread
- Or 20g of a suitable cereal and 180ml milk
- Or One portion of fruit and diet/light or plain yoghurt

**Mid-morning**

See healthy snack list

**Lunch**

- Two slices granary or seeded bread
- Or 150g-200g new potatoes, boiled
- Or 150g baked potato
- Or 135g cooked basmati rice
- Or 135g cooked pasta
- Or 175g cooked cous cous
- And 50-75g lean meat or fish or 50g cheese
- Or 1-2 eggs or small can baked beans
- And vegetables or salad

Fruit or diet/light yoghurt

**Mid-afternoon**

As mid-morning (see healthy snack list)
Evening meal

- 200g new potatoes, boiled
- Or 150g baked potato
- Or 135g cooked basmati rice
- Or 135g cooked pasta
- Or 175g cooked cous cous
- Or Two slices granary or seeded bread
- And 75-100g lean meat or fish
- And vegetables or salad

Fruit or diet/light yoghurt unsweetened dessert

Before bed
See healthy snack list

Daily

Aim for three portions of milk and dairy foods.
One portion is one third of a pint (180ml) semi-skimmed milk, or 150g yoghurt or 1oz (25g) cheese.
Healthy Snacks

If you need a snack in between meals, try to choose healthier options. Some healthy snack ideas are provided below:

- One portion of fresh fruit
- One glass of low-fat milk
- One small pot of diet or light yoghurt
- Two plain biscuits
- One slice of seeded or granary bread
- Two wholegrain crackers

Weight management

Extreme dietary restrictions to aid weight loss are not recommended during pregnancy.

It is worth remembering that pregnant women do not need to eat more than they did before pregnancy. Calorie requirements do not increase until the last three months of pregnancy (and then only by 200 calories per day).

The best way to manage weight during pregnancy is to follow a healthy diet and to lead an active lifestyle.
Fruit and vegetables

Aim to have five portions of fruit and vegetables per day. This means two to three portions of fruit daily and two to three portions of salad or vegetables daily.

Fruit and vegetables are suitable fresh, frozen or tinned. Tinned fruit should be in natural juice and not syrup.

What is a portion?

- One small banana
- One medium apple/pear/peach/orange
- Two satsumas/plums
- Seven strawberries
- Handful of grapes
- Three dried apricots
- One tablespoon sultanas
- Three tablespoons cooked vegetables
- Seven cherry tomatoes
- Bowl of lettuce
# How do I reduce my fat intake?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High fat foods</th>
<th>Low fat alternatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fried foods</td>
<td>Grill, microwave, boil or bake your foods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Butter or margarine</td>
<td>Low fat spreads high in polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fats e.g. sunflower or olive oil based spreads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full fat cheeses e.g. Cheddar</td>
<td>Reduced fat cheeses, Edam, Gouda, cottage cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full cream milk</td>
<td>Semi-skimmed, skimmed milk or 1% milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayonnaise, salad cream and dressings</td>
<td>Low calorie or reduced fat mayonnaise or salad cream or salad dressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastries, pies, pizza, breaded/battered foods</td>
<td>Lean cuts of meat/fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisps</td>
<td>Fruit, low-fat crisps, diet/light yoghurt, Ryvita/oatcakes with low fat cheese</td>
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Salt

High blood pressure can cause problems throughout pregnancy. Reducing the salt in your diet can help to lower your blood pressure.

You can limit the amount of salt you eat by:

- Trying not to add salt when cooking or at the table
- Trying different flavourings for food e.g. pepper, herbs and spices
- Reducing salty snacks e.g. nuts, crisps, marmite, tinned and powdered soup
- Cutting down on the number of smoked foods e.g. smoked fish or bacon
- Take care with processed foods or pre-prepared foods as these tend to have a high salt content, these include tinned and packet soups, processed meat products such as burgers and sausages, tinned meats and pastas and ready meals.
Oily fish

Oily fish can help protect the heart. It is recommended to include one to two portions of oily fish per week. These include sardines, pilchards, fresh tuna, trout, herring, pilchards, salmon and kippers.

If you do not like this type of fish you may wish to discuss this with your dietitian.

Physical activity

Physical activity is recommended to be included five times a week. During pregnancy the majority of activities can still be undertaken.

Increasing activity can help lower your blood sugar levels.
Are there any foods I should avoid?

In pregnancy, there are certain foods to avoid or use in moderation due to the risk it may have on your unborn baby. The advice below may help you with food safety during your pregnancy.

- Raw or uncooked foods – avoid products and dishes that contain raw and partially cooked eggs e.g. homemade mayonnaise, ice-cream (including soft whipped ice-cream). Avoid raw shellfish, raw or undercooked meat and chicken. This will help you to avoid food poisoning from salmonella.

- Cheese – avoid soft cheese such as Brie, Camembert, sheep and goats cheese and blue veined cheese or stilton due to the risk of Listeria.

- Fish – avoid shark, marlin and swordfish. Limit oily fish and fresh tuna to twice per week or canned tuna to four times a week due to the mercury or contaminants contained in these fish.

- Liver – avoid liver and liver pate due to the high levels of vitamin A. You should also avoid multivitamins containing higher levels of vitamin A.

- Caffeine – limit coffee to two mugs and tea to three mugs daily. Take care with high energy drinks and coca-cola drinks.

- Alcohol – avoid in pregnancy.
Diabetes UK

Diabetes UK is a good source of information for people with diabetes.

Contact details are shown below:

Diabetes UK
10 Parkway
Camden Town
London
NW1 7AA

Tel: 020 7424 1000
Web address: www.diabetes.org.uk
Tell us what you think

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 725269 or email donna.williams@york.nhs.uk.

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