

What should I do after my baby is born?

Your health care provider will check your blood sugar level often, starting right after your baby is born. For most women, blood sugar levels go back to normal quickly after having their babies.

Six weeks² after your baby is born, you should have a blood test to find out whether your blood sugar level is back to normal. This test is similar to the one you took to find out whether or not you had gestational diabetes. Based on the results of the test, you will fall into one of three categories.

AFTER-PREGNANCY TEST CATEGORIES ^{2,12}	
If your category is...	You should...
Normal	Get checked for diabetes every three years.
Impaired Glucose Tolerance	Get checked for diabetes every year. Talk to your health care provider about ways to lower your risk level for diabetes.
Diabetic	Work with your health care provider to set up a treatment plan for your diabetes.

The test also checks your risk for getting diabetes in the future. Women who have had gestational diabetes have a 40 percent higher chance^{2,3} than women who haven't had gestational diabetes of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

Getting checked for diabetes is important because type 2 diabetes shows few symptoms. The only way to know for sure that you have type 2 diabetes is to have a blood test that reveals a higher-than-normal blood sugar level. You should also tell your health care provider right away if you notice any of these things:

- Being very thirsty
- Urinating often
- Feeling constantly or overly tired
- Losing weight quickly and/or without reason

Having one or more of these symptoms does not necessarily mean you have diabetes, but your health care provider might want to test you to make sure. Detecting type 2 diabetes early can help you avoid problems, like early heart disease and damage to your eyes, kidneys, or nerves. If you choose to use birth control methods in the future, talk with your health care provider about a method that won't increase your risk of developing diabetes.

Can I breastfeed² even though I have gestational diabetes?

Like all mothers, women with gestational diabetes should breastfeed their babies, if possible. Breastfeeding provides a number of benefits for your baby, including the right balance of nutrients and protection against certain illnesses. Breastfeeding is also beneficial for mothers. It allows your body to use up some extra calories that were stored during pregnancy. Losing weight after having the baby enhances overall health and is one way to reduce your chances of developing diabetes later in life. Many women who have gestational diabetes also find that breastfeeding improves their fasting blood sugar level and allows them to maintain a lower average blood sugar level once their babies are born.

How can I tell if I am likely to develop diabetes in the future?

Certain traits increase your chances of getting type 2 diabetes within five years¹² of having your baby. If you have one or more of the following, you should talk to your health care provider about type 2 diabetes:

- You developed gestational diabetes before your 24th week of pregnancy.
- Your blood sugar level during pregnancy was consistently on the high end of the healthy range.
- Your blood sugar levels after the baby was born were higher-than-average, according to your health care provider.
- You are in the impaired glucose tolerance category (see the *After-Pregnancy Test Categories* table on page 33).
- You are obese, according to your health care provider.
- You have diabetes in your family.

- You belong to a high-risk ethnic group (Hispanic, African American, Native American, South or East Asian, Pacific Islander, Indigenous Australian).
- You have had gestational diabetes with other pregnancies.

If you have *any* of these risk factors, it is even more important that you get tested yearly for diabetes. Remember that you can take steps to lower your risk for type 2 diabetes, such as eating a low-fat diet, losing extra weight, and getting regular, moderate physical activity.

Plan your next pregnancy.

If you know that you want to get pregnant in the future, have a blood sugar test up to three months before becoming pregnant to make sure you have a normal blood sugar level. If your blood sugar level is high, you may have developed type 2 diabetes without knowing it. As mentioned earlier in this booklet, high blood sugar early in the pregnancy (within the first eight weeks) can affect the developing body and organ systems of the fetus. It's important to get your blood sugar level under control before you get pregnant.

If you do get pregnant again, make sure your health care provider knows that you had gestational diabetes with your last pregnancy. If you had gestational diabetes with one pregnancy, your risk¹³ of getting it with another pregnancy is about 36 percent.

You can control gestational diabetes.

It may seem like a lot of work, but most women can successfully control their gestational diabetes and have healthy pregnancies. **You can do it, too!** Follow the treatment plan your health care provider designs for you. A healthy pregnancy and a healthy birth are the greatest rewards.

Where can I go for more information about gestational diabetes?

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

The mission of the NICHD is to ensure that every person is born healthy and wanted, that women suffer no harmful effects from the reproductive process, and that all children have the chance to fulfill their potential for a healthy and productive life, free of disease or disability, and to ensure the health, productivity, independence, and well-being of all people through optimal rehabilitation. The NICHD Information Resource Center is your one-stop source for NICHD brochures, booklets, and other materials related to the health of children, adults, families, and populations, including information about gestational diabetes.

You can contact the NICHD Information Resource Center at:

Phone: 1-800-370-2943

Mail: P.O. Box 3006, Rockville, MD 20847

Fax: 301-984-1473

E-mail: NICHDInformationResourceCenter@mail.nih.gov

Internet: <http://www.nichd.nih.gov>

Other resources

- **National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (NDIC)** provides information about diabetes and how to manage diabetes from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK).

Phone: 301-654-3327

Mail: 1 Information Way, Bethesda, MD 20892

Fax: 301-907-8906

E-mail: ndic@info.niddk.nih.gov

Internet: <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/diabetes/ndic.htm>

- **The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP)** is a partnership between the NIDDK, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and more than 200 public and private organizations. To get free single copies of NDEP sample materials, please call the automated system or visit the Program Web site.
Phone: 1-800-438-5383
E-mail: lisingm@niddk.nih.gov
Internet: <http://ndep.nih.gov>
- **American Dietetic Association (ADA) Consumer Hotline** provides information about how to find a dietitian.
Phone: 1-800-366-1655
Internet: <http://www.eatright.org>
- **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)** is the nation's leading group of professionals providing health care for women. ACOG provides various patient education resources, assistance in finding a physician, and additional information services.
Phone: 202-638-5577
Mail: 409 12th St., SW, PO Box 96920, Washington, D.C. 20090-6920
E-mail: resources@acog.org
Internet: <http://www.acog.org>
- **American Diabetes Association** is the nation's leading nonprofit health organization providing diabetes research, information, and advocacy.
Phone: 1-800-diabetes or 1-800-342-2383
Mail: 1701 North Beauregard Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22311
E-mail: customerservice@diabetes.org
Internet: <http://www.diabetes.org>