



Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes is a form of diabetes (high blood glucose levels) that can develop during pregnancy. What you eat and drink directly affects the amount of glucose in your blood. This leaflet gives advice about healthy foods to eat to give you the best chance of a healthy pregnancy and baby if you are diagnosed with gestational diabetes.

What is gestational diabetes?

Blood glucose (sugar) levels are controlled by a hormone called insulin. During pregnancy, the placenta produces additional hormones for baby's growth and development. They can prevent insulin working well, leading to higher blood glucose levels and gestational diabetes.

This condition can develop at any stage of pregnancy and is more common in the second and third trimesters. After birth, it usually disappears. However healthy eating and managing your weight is important after birth to reduce the chance of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

Monitoring and management is needed for a healthy pregnancy, birth, and well-baby. A team of healthcare professionals will advise you on diet, exercise and if needed, medications to help manage your blood glucose levels.



Why is nutrition important?

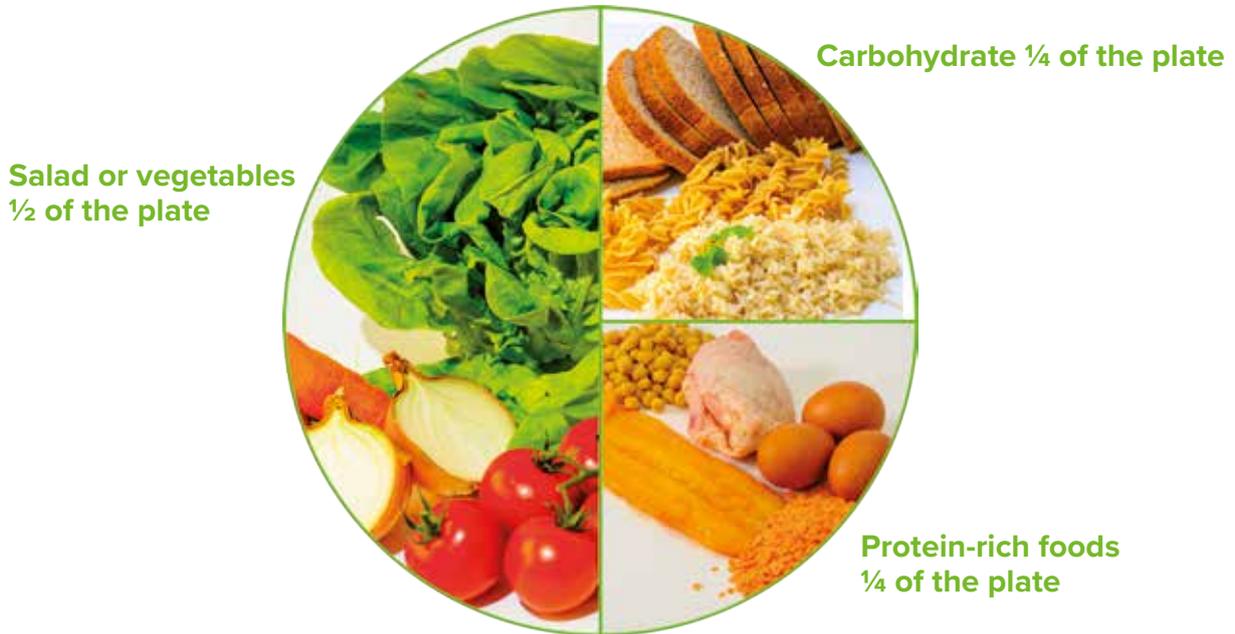
Choosing healthy nutritious food during pregnancy will prevent excess weight gain and support your baby's development and growth.

When you eat carbohydrates, they release glucose into the blood. Carbohydrates have the greatest impact on blood glucose levels. You can directly improve your blood glucose levels by reducing the amount of carbohydrates, and changing to slower release ones. Dietitians can support you to make changes that will enable you to manage your gestational diabetes. Ask for a referral if you haven't been offered one.

Gestational Diabetes

Choose foods from each group to reduce the impact on your blood glucose levels. Try to base your meals as shown below:

Picture 1: Plate food group portion size recommendations



Starchy carbohydrates

Eat one portion of these at every meal. Limit them to a quarter of your plate. (Aim for 30-50g carbohydrate. This is 1 portion).

Choose slow release, low glycaemic index (low GI) carbohydrates. These are often higher in fibre which is good for healthy gut bacteria.

Table 1: Carbohydrate swaps list

Type of Starchy Carbohydrate	Choose	Limit
Pasta, noodles	Brown (if available)	White/refined
Bread, pitta, chapatti	Sourdough/wholegrain/granary/seeded/rye/pumpernickel	White/brown/wholemeal
Rice, grains, pulses	Brown, basmati, pearl barley, quinoa, chickpeas, lentils	White, instant, long grain, jasmine, sticky
Potatoes	Sweet or new potatoes, yams, green bananas, cassava, plantain	White (baked, mashed, boiled)
Cereals	Oats (porridge), nutty muesli	Frosted/chocolate/cornflakes/puffs, fruity muesli

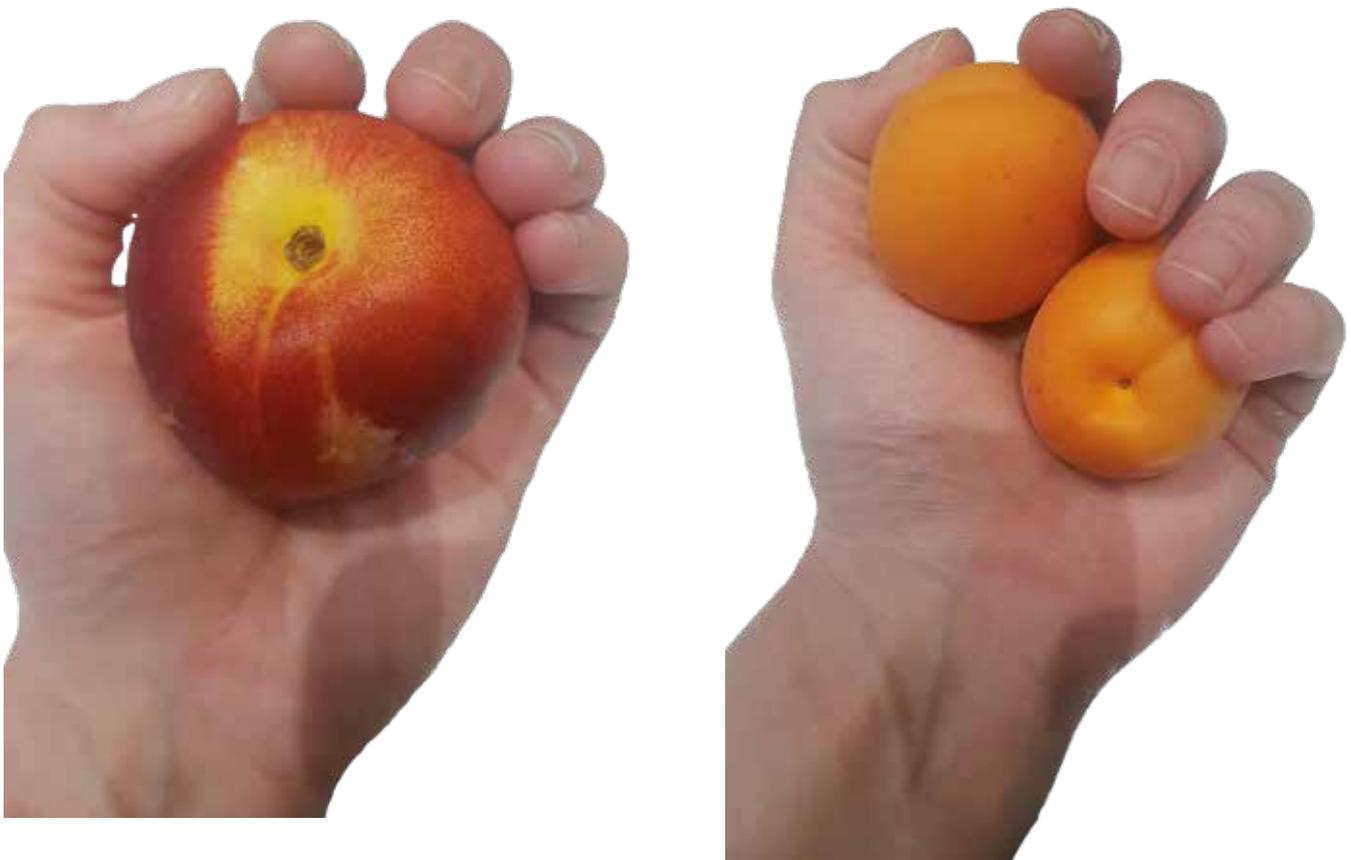
Fruit and vegetables

Eat a variety of different coloured fruit and vegetables. These provide you with vitamins, minerals, and fibre.

- Aim to eat at least 5 portions per day. Include more vegetables and salads.
- Aim to fill half of your meal plate with vegetables.
- Have one portion of fruit at a time (one portion fits into the palm of your hand) e.g. 1 apple, 1 orange, 2 apricots.
- Avoid fruit juice and fruit-based smoothies (both homemade and shop bought). These are high in sugar.

Gestational Diabetes

Picture 2: Fruit portion sizes



Foods high in sugar

Chocolate, biscuits, crisps, cakes, ice creams and sweets should only be eaten occasionally (not every day) and in small amounts.

- *Check food labels: reduce foods labelled with 'red' sugar content. Choose low foods labelled as 5g of sugars per 100g/100ml.*
- *Avoid sugar, syrups, treacle, molasses, agave nectar or honey. You can use artificial sweeteners to sweeten foods.*
- *Choose sugar free, diet or artificially sweetened diluted or carbonated drinks.*

Dairy and alternatives

These contain carbohydrates and are a good source of calcium and protein. Tell your diabetes team if you are using milk to treat indigestion.

Aim for three portions per day. Choose lower fat versions if you are trying to limit weight gain.

E.g.

- *1 glass of milk*
- *1 pot (150g) of diet or low sugar yoghurt*
- *25g of any cheese.*

Unsweetened nut and coconut milks are lower carbohydrate plant based milks.

Avoid canned milks such as condensed or evaporated.

Gestational Diabetes

Snacks

Table 2: Snack ideas containing low or no carbohydrate

1 handful of berries	1 apple/1 pear/2 kiwis/2 apricots	Sliced vegetables with cheese dip/salsa/hummus
2 rich tea biscuits	1 handful of nuts or seeds	2 boiled eggs
Olives	Avocado	Low fat cheese
Pasteurised sliced meats (ham/peppered salami/chicken/turkey)	2 breadsticks	1-2 oatcakes with cheese/salsa/peanut butter
1 apple and 1 teaspoon peanut butter	1 fun size banana	Sugar free jelly
1 small chapatti/roti	1 mini vegetable samosa	1 small vegetable pakora
1 pot (150g) diet yogurt	100ml high protein ice cream	1 cheese straw

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and vegetarian/vegan alternatives

These are good sources of protein, iron and minerals.

Include these at each mealtime and cover a quarter of your plate.

Choose lower fat versions if you are trying to limit weight gain.

Top Tips

To help lower your blood glucose levels:

- *Aim to eat regularly spaced meals throughout the day.*
- *Fill yourself up on vegetables (½ plate) and protein (¼ plate), with the remaining ¼ as slow release carbohydrates.*
- *Choose slow release carbohydrates, such as lentils, chickpeas, beans.*
- *Choose lower carbohydrate fruits i.e. berries, grapefruit, cherries, apricots, and plums.*
- *Choose higher protein, lower carbohydrate yoghurt brands i.e. low-fat Greek yoghurt, Icelandic varieties.*
- *Choose low or no carbohydrate snacks.*
- *Use artificial sweeteners, such as saccharin, aspartame, acesulfame K, sucralose and stevia if you wish to sweeten foods.*
- *Include 10 to 15 minutes' activity before each blood glucose check.*

Milky drinks can be made with cows' milk or unsweetened milk alternatives (nut/plant based). Add sugar free milkshake syrups or powders if needed.

Gestational Diabetes

Further information

Do not starve yourself. Both you and baby need enough nutrients to have energy and grow. If you feel hungry or need help with any of these changes, please speak to your healthcare team.

For more information about healthy eating, supplements and lifestyle in pregnancy visit <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/pregnancy-diet.html>

Useful links:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gestational-diabetes/>

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/diabetes-the-basics/gestational-diabetes>

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