

Healthy eating for gestational diabetes

Keeping your blood glucose levels under control during pregnancy is vital to a healthy pregnancy. Lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise are an important role in helping you to keep your blood glucose as close to normal as possible.

Keeping your diet healthy and balanced and following specific tips can help you maintain good blood glucose control.

Tips for managing blood glucose levels

1. Have three regular meals per day

Leaving long gaps between eating can make it harder to control your appetite and blood glucose levels. Try and have dinner by 7:30pm.

2. Limit your intake of sugary foods and drinks

Avoid high sugar foods and drinks such as fizzy drinks, fruit juice, smoothies, sweets, chocolate, cake, biscuits, desserts, honey, brown and white sugar and jam.

Avoid adding sugar to foods and drinks. Try low or zero-calorie sweeteners instead, also known as artificial sweeteners, instead of using sugar.

It is not necessary to buy 'diabetic' foods. They can be expensive, high in fat, and the sweeteners they contain may cause you to have diarrhoea.

3. Carbohydrates

Carbohydrate foods are broken down into glucose which is used by the body for energy. These foods have a direct effect on blood glucose levels.

These include:

- Breads, chapatti, roti, pita bread, bagels (anything made with flour)
- Rice, pasta, noodles, cous cous, quinoa, barley, dumplings
- Breakfast cereals, cereal bars and crackers
- Starchy vegetables like sweet potato, potato, yam, plantain

- Beans and legumes (minimal carbohydrate, good source of protein) – do not cause a rise in blood glucose levels.
- Fruit (fresh, tinned and dried)
- Milk and yoghurt
- Sugary foods and drinks

To manage your blood glucose levels, you need to eat the right **type** and **portion size** of carbohydrate foods

4. Type of carbohydrate

Some carbohydrate foods are broken down more slowly which can help manage your blood glucose levels.

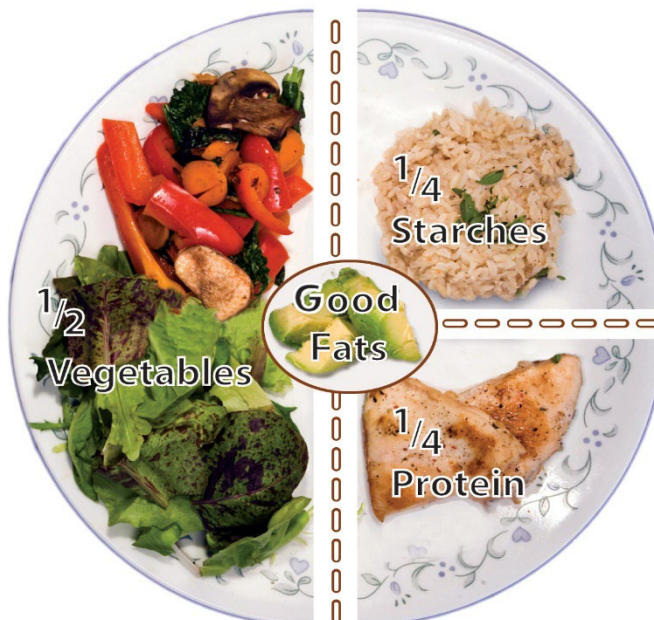
Switching from white flour products to wholegrain alternatives is a healthier choice and supports better blood sugar management and increasing fibre which improves bowel health.

Pairing carbohydrates with protein help to slow digestion leading to a more gradual rise in blood glucose.

Please refer to Diabetes UK for more information: <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/enjoy-food/carbohydrates-and-diabetes/glycaemic-index-and-diabetes>

5. Portion sizes of carbohydrates

Use the portion plate below as a guide and refer to the sample meal plan for meal options.



Remember everyone is individual in blood glucose response to carbohydrate foods and tolerance levels can change during pregnancy. This is only a guide and you may find that these quantities are not exactly right for you.

It is important not to cut out carbohydrate completely from your diet; this causes your body to burn fat for energy which produces ketones which are toxic to the baby. Therefore, eating a small amount of carbohydrate at each meal is vital.

6. Breakfast

Some women find that eating a lower carbohydrate breakfast can help manage blood glucose levels at this time. This is due to a rise in hormones in the morning.

You may wish to change from a high carbohydrate meal such as a breakfast cereal and milk to a higher protein meal such as eggs on wholegrain toast. Please refer to the sample meal plan.

7. Snacks

Snacks may be needed if you are hungry in between your meals. We recommend that you limit to 2-3 snacks per day, spaced out in between meals. Portion size is also important and as a guide we recommend you stick to 10-15g of total carbohydrate per snack.

Some examples below:

- Unsalted nuts/seeds
- One fruit portion
- 150g natural or Greek yoghurt
- 2 crackers or 1 rice cake with cheese
- 1 biscuit
- Vegetable sticks with hummus/cream cheese/salsa dip
- Roasted chickpeas

For more snack options please refer to the snack list provided.

8. Fruit and Vegetables

- **One portion of vegetables** = 3 tbsp of cooked vegetables **or** 1 small bowl of salad
- **One portion fruit (80g)** (similar to a handful) = 1 medium orange or a kids size firm banana or apple **or** 2 small satsumas, plums **or** 8 grapes (a handful)

Fruit should be limited to three portions per day however vegetables can be eaten freely.

9. Eat a minimum 2-3 portions of protein foods daily. One portion equals:

- 80g meat (portion similar to a deck of cards)
- 120g fish (portion similar to palm of your hand of white fish, deck of cards for oily fish)
- 2 eggs
- 3-4 tbsp pulses
- 100g Quorn or tofu (1/2 cup)
- 30g nuts (handful)

10. Eat three portions of calcium-rich foods daily. One portion equals:

- 200ml milk or fortified alternatives
- 150g yoghurt – natural or Greek style
- 25g cheese (similar to matchbox size)

Non-dairy foods containing calcium

- calcium enriched soya products
- green leafy vegetables
- tofu
- almonds
- beans
- dahl

11. Reduce your intake of unhealthy fat and fatty foods

Fat does not affect your blood glucose directly but if eaten in large amounts it can cause extra weight gain, which can make it more difficult to control your blood glucose levels. Including healthy fats can improve your blood sugars control by slowing carbohydrate absorption. Good choices are olive oil, avocado, nuts and seeds and oily fish. Limit unhealthy fats (e.g. fry ups and ultra-processed foods).

12. Hydration

It is important that you aim for 1.5-2 litres of fluid a day to help prevent constipation and keep you well hydrated during pregnancy. Remember to avoid sugary fluids as these will increase blood glucose levels.

Good fluid choices:

- Water or sparkling water

- Tea or coffee (Max 2 cups of tea OR 2 cups instant coffee per day due to caffeine content)
- Decaf tea or coffee
- No added sugar cordials/squashes
- Sugar free fizzy drinks that contain artificial sweeteners

13. Keep active

Physical activity can help to improve your body's sensitivity to insulin. You could try to do 20 minutes of physical activity such as walking between eating and the hour of testing to help achieve good blood glucose control.

Regular exercise also will help to keep you fit and prepares you for the birth of your baby.

The most important thing about activity is that you do something that you enjoy.

Before starting or continuing any form of physical activity, always check with your health care professional team.

Useful sources of information

Diabetes UK:

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/diabetes-the-basics/food-and-diabetes/i-have-gestational-diabetes>

BDA food Facts Sheet:

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/pregnancy-diet.html>

Contact us

Please don't hesitate to contact us via telephone if you have any concerns or questions.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453

Email: pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency.

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Tel: 111

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You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk).

The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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Sample Meal Plan

Aim to have three regular meals per day. Lunch and evening meal suggestions are interchangeable.

Breakfast

- 1 slice granary/seeded bread with topping*
- Omelette (add vegetables of choice) and 1 slice granary/seeded bread
- Cooked breakfast: eggs, spinach, tomato, mushrooms and 200g baked beans
- 200g natural Greek yogurt with handful nuts/seeds and handful of berries
- 1 small chapatti with curry (meat/chicken/paneer)

*eggs, cheese, peanut butter, avocado, cooked ham

Lunch

- 2 slices granary/seeded bread with chicken/tuna/cheese/egg and salad
- 1 wholemeal wrap with chicken/tuna/cheese/egg and salad
- 2 small (hand size) chapatti with curry and vegetables/salad
- Chicken and vegetable soup and 1 small bread roll
- Lentil soup with 1 slice granary/seeded bread
- Scrambled eggs with avocado and 2 slices granary/seeded bread

Evening Meal

- ¼ plate (fist size) cooked pasta, beef bolognese and salad
- ¼ plate (fist size) sweet potato with baked fish, onions, peppers, tomatoes
- Fajitas made with 2 small wraps, chicken, onion, peppers, cheese and salad
- ¼ plate (fist size) cooked Basmati rice, curry (meat/chicken/paneer) and vegetables/salad
- Nicoise salad: tuna, egg, green beans, salad and 5-6 small new potatoes
- Stir fry made with tofu, fist-sized portion noodles and vegetables

If you follow a vegan or vegetarian diet, please substitute protein rich foods for alternatives (e.g. tofu, meat substitutes, pulses). **If adding a large portion of pulses the portion of carbohydrate (starchy) food at that meal may need to be reduced.**

Snack Options for Gestational Diabetes

Snacks between meals should be ideally 2 hours after a main meal and to prevent blood glucose levels from rising should contain 10-15g or less of carbohydrate.

Fruit	
Tropical fruit are generally high in sugar	
1 Kiwi Fruit	5g
1 Slice Mango (40g)	5g
1 Slice Pineapple (40g)	5g
5 Strawberries	5g
1 small handful of blueberries	5g
1 medium size Apple	10g
3 Raw Apricots	10g
1 large slice Melon (150g)	10g
1 Nectarine/Peach	10g
1 Pear	10g
2 Plums	10g
Small handful of dried fruit and nuts	10g
Dairy	
Plain low fat or fat free yoghurt (150g pot)	10-12g
Full fat plain yoghurt (150g)	8-10g
Milk - cows (200ml)	10g
Savoury Snacks	
2 Handfuls of plain Popcorn	10g
1 small packet popcorn (15g non sweet)	8g
1 Large Rice Cake	7-8g
2 corn cakes or oatcakes	10g
2 crackers	10g
Biscuits	
1 biscuit	10g
2 Rich Tea or Malted Milk	10g

Carb free snacks	
Tomato and mozzarella salad	
Olives	
Gherkins	
Pickled onions	
Tomato Salsa	
Humous (2 table spoons)	
Vegetable sticks	
Crab sticks	
Hardboiled egg/ egg mayo	
Cold meats or chicken or fish (cooked or tinned)	
Cocktail sausages	
Prawn cocktail 200g	
Tzatziki	
Sour Cream and Chive Dip/Thousand Island Dip	
Cheese (30g/matchbox size)	
Low/full fat cream cheese	
Low fat cottage cheese	
Avocado	
Beetroot	
Plain nuts	
Peanut butter	