

Healthy Eating for Pregnancy When You Have Diabetes

If you're pregnant and you have type 1 or type 2 diabetes, let your healthcare team know as soon as possible. Managing your blood sugar all through your pregnancy will help keep you and your baby healthy.

If you're thinking about getting pregnant, talk to your healthcare team about planning ahead for your best blood sugar control in a healthy pregnancy.

Managing your blood sugar during pregnancy can help prevent problems.

- During the first trimester, high blood sugar can increase the risk of miscarriage or birth defects.
- High blood sugar can cause your baby to grow bigger than is healthy. This can cause problems during your baby's birth and later on.
- High blood sugar during your baby's birth can increase his or her risk of having low blood sugar and breathing problems at birth.

Your healthcare team will support you in managing your blood sugar to have a healthy pregnancy.

Nutrition tips for diabetes during pregnancy

1. Spread carbohydrates over the day

Carbohydrates are important for your baby's growth. Because they affect your blood sugar, it's important to spread carbohydrates over the day into 3 smaller meals, with snacks as needed.

Carbohydrate foods have sugar and starch:

- beans, lentils
- milk and yogurt
- fruits
- starchy vegetables
- grains
- sugar and sweet foods

Foods with **little or no carbohydrate** have little effect on your blood sugar. These include:

- most vegetables
- protein foods—meat, fish, poultry, eggs, tofu
- fats—oils, margarine, salad dressing

2. Count carbohydrates and read labels

Knowing how much carbohydrate is in the food you eat helps you to manage your blood sugar. If you take insulin, matching the amount of insulin you take with the carbohydrate you eat will help prevent low and high blood sugar after meals.

Find out how much carbohydrate is in your meals and snacks from food lists in other diabetes handouts, food labels, or apps and online nutrition counters. If you need more information about label reading and carbohydrate counting, ask your dietitian.

3. Choose higher fibre foods more often

Foods higher in fibre help control your blood sugar and help prevent constipation. Higher fibre foods include:

- dried, cooked, beans, peas, lentils
- vegetables
- whole grains
- fruits

4. Eat foods higher in protein at each meal and evening snack

Protein is important for your health and your baby's health. It doesn't raise blood sugar, and may keep your blood sugar from rising too high after eating.

Foods higher in protein include:

- meat
- cottage cheese
- dried, cooked beans, peas, lentils
- poultry
- Greek yogurt
- fish
- tofu
- cheese
- eggs

5. Watch for low blood sugar

If you take insulin, changes in hormones during the first trimester may cause lower blood sugar than usual. To help prevent low blood sugar, spread your meals and snacks over the day, and eat at the same times every day. Work with your healthcare team to manage your insulin to prevent lows.

Always carry fast-acting carbohydrate with you to treat lows. If you're not sure how to treat low blood sugar, talk to your diabetes team.

6. You can use sugar substitutes and foods with sugar substitutes in small amounts

Sugar substitutes don't raise your blood sugar. Read labels to find out what kind of sugar substitute is in the food you buy.

These sugar substitutes are safe when you're pregnant	
Sugar substitute	Brand name
acesulfame potassium (Ace-K)	Added to packaged foods
aspartame	Nutrasweet [®] , Equal [®] , store brands
saccharin	Hermesetas [®]
stevia	Sugar Twin [®] , Truvia [®] , Pure Via [®] , store brands
sucralose	Splenda [®] , Sugar Twin [®] , store brands
These sugar substitutes are NOT safe when you're pregnant	
Sugar substitute	Brand name
cyclamate	Sucaryl [®] , Sugar Twin [®] , Sweet N'Low [®] , Weight Watchers [®] , store brands

7. Take a multivitamin

Take a multivitamin with folic acid, iron, vitamin B₁₂, and vitamin D every day during your pregnancy and for as long as you breastfeed.

Folic acid supplements help prevent problems while your baby's spine and nervous system are forming (neural tube defects). The table below tells you how much to take in your multivitamin.

For type 1 and type 2 diabetes:	Folic acid every day:
At least 3 months before pregnancy, and for the first 3 months of pregnancy	1.0 mg (1000 mcg) in your multivitamin
For the last 6 months of pregnancy and as long as you breastfeed	0.4–1.0 mg (400–1000 mcg) in your multivitamin

Some women need different amounts of folic acid. Ask your healthcare team about the supplement that's right for you.

Other nutrition and lifestyle topics:

• Gain a healthy amount of weight

Weight gain is an important part of pregnancy. The best weight gain for you depends on your weight before pregnancy. Your healthcare team can help you decide on a healthy weight gain for you. To find out more, search *healthy weight gain* at www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca.

• Be active everyday

Talk to your healthcare team about the type and amount of activity that's right for you.

Being active every day can help control your blood sugar and help you manage weight gain. It may improve your sleep and mood, give you more energy, and prepare your body for childbirth. If you take insulin, ask your healthcare team about changing your food or insulin dose for activity.

• Visit www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca or talk to your dietitian to find out more about:

- calcium and vitamin D
- iron
- food safety
- omega-3 fats
- common problems in pregnancy: heartburn, nausea, vomiting, and constipation

Breastfeeding after pregnancy

Breastfeeding has many benefits for you and your baby. One benefit is that it may help reduce baby's risk of developing diabetes later in life.

If you take insulin you'll have a higher risk of low blood sugar while breastfeeding. To prevent low blood sugar:

- eat a snack that contains carbohydrate while you breastfeed
- talk to your healthcare team about any changes in your insulin you might need to make

You can read more about breastfeeding at www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca.

After pregnancy, visit your doctor and healthcare team to talk about the changes you need to make to manage your diabetes.