Healthy Eating with Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes is when you have high blood sugar during pregnancy. This may happen because of risk factors like age, ethnicity, medications, and changes in your hormones during pregnancy. The hormones affect how your body's cells use sugar, which can raise your blood sugar.

Having high blood sugar increases risks for you and your baby.

- Your baby may grow bigger than is healthy. This can cause problems during your baby's birth and later in life.
- You're at higher risk of having gestational diabetes in your next pregnancy and of having type 2 diabetes later in life.

There are many things you can do to lower these risks:

- eat healthy
- be active
- check your blood sugar
- take medicine as prescribed

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

Healthy meal planning

Eating balanced meals can help manage your blood sugars.

Fill your plate like the one below to spread carbohydrates over the day and get the nutrients you and your baby need.

Eat 3 meals and 2 or more snacks every day

Spreading food over your day helps to keep your blood sugar from going too high or too low. Try having a snack between meals and one before bed.

- Cover ½ your plate with non-starchy vegetables. A portion of fruit may also be included in this part of the plate.
- Put whole grain products and starchy vegetables on ¼ of the plate. Some starchy vegetables are potatoes, yams, corn, squash, and parsnips.
- Put protein foods on ¼ of the plate. Some protein foods are meat, fish, eggs, cheese, and tofu.
- Have milk, fortified soy beverage or yogurt with some of your meals or snacks.
- When you're thirsty, choose water.

Spread carbohydrates over the day

Carbohydrates provide energy and nutrients for your baby to grow healthy.

Carbohydrate foods have sugar and starch, which turns into blood sugar. Examples of carbohydrate foods are:

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

It's important to spread carbohydrates over the day to give you and your baby a steady supply of the nutrients needed for a growing baby.

Eat foods higher in protein at each meal and evening snack

Protein is important for your health and your baby's health. Foods high in protein can help manage your blood sugar. Protein foods include:

- beans, split peas, and lentils
- cheese
- cottage cheese
- eggs
- fish
- Greek and Icelandic yogurt/skyr
- meat
- poultry
- tofu, soy, and edamame

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Snacks

Healthy snacks can be used to give you and your baby the extra energy, vitamins, and minerals you both need during pregnancy.

Aim for snacks with carbohydrate. Include carbohydrate and a food higher in protein at your bedtime snack.

Limit foods and drinks that are high in sugars, such as:

- table sugar
- brown sugar
- candy
- honey
- sweetened drinks
- syrup
- regular jams
- unsweetened juice (has natural sugar)

How much carbohydrate do I need in a day?

Everyone needs a different amount of carbohydrate. **A carbohydrate choice is the amount of food that has about 15 grams of carbohydrate.**

Counting carbohydrate choices will help you:

- know how much carbohydrate you're eating and how much it raises your blood sugar
- meet your carbohydrate goals for meals and snacks

Use page 3 with your dietitian to help you find the amount that's right for you. Use the food lists to show you what **1 carbohydrate choice** is for different foods.

Below is an example of how to spread your carbohydrate over the day:

Meal	Carbohydrate choices	Grams of carbohydrate
Breakfast	3 choices	45 grams
Snack	1–2 choices	15–30 grams
Lunch	3–4 choices	45–60 grams
Snack	1–2 choices	15–30 grams
Dinner	3–4 choices	45–60 grams
Bedtime snack	1–2 choices	15–30 grams

How to find the carbohydrate content of the food you eat

Carbohydrates include sugar, starch, and fibre. Sugar and starch are **available carbohydrates (AC)** because they raise your blood sugar. Fibre doesn't raise your blood sugar.

To figure out the **AC** in a serving of food:

grams of carbohydrate
– grams of fibre
= grams of available carbohydrate (AC)

Check the Nutrition Facts table on packaged food. Look for the **serving size** and look for **carbohydrate** and **fibre.**

Bran flakes

Find the **serving size**. If you eat more or less than this, adjust the nutrient amounts.

Find the grams of **carbohydrate** in one serving.

Find the grams of **fibre** in one serving

Nutrition Facts

Per 1 cup (250 mL) (34 g)	
Calories 120	% Daily Value*
Fat 1 g	2 %
Saturated 0 g	0 %
+Trans 0 g	
Carbohydrate 28 g	
Fibre 5 g	20 %
Sugars 5 g	5 %
Sugar alcohols 0 g	
Starch 18 g	
Protein 4 g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 210 mg	9 %
Potassium 150 mg	3 %
Calcium 300 mg	23 %
Iron 0 mg	0 %

*5% or less is **a little**, 15% or more is **a lot**

Example: Bran flakes

28 grams of carbohydrate
– 5 grams of fibre
= 23 grams of available carbohydrate

*If the Nutrition Facts table lists **sugar alcohols**, subtract the sugar alcohols and fibre from the carbohydrate.

Choose higher fibre foods more often.

Higher fibre foods help control your blood sugar and help prevent constipation. These include:

- whole grains
- vegetables
- fruits
- beans, split peas, and lentils
- nuts, seeds, and nut butters

Read the Nutrition Facts table on food packages to find foods higher in fibre. The higher the % daily value the more fibre is in one serving.

My carbohydrate goals:

At a meal: _____ choices or _____ grams **At a snack:** _____ choices or _____ grams

Carbohydrate choices

The food lists below tell you how much food is 1 carbohydrate choice (15 g carbohydrate).

Grains and Starchy Vegetables

Grains:

bagel, ¼ large or ½ small
bannock, whole grain, 1½ x 2½ inches (4 x 6 cm)
barley or bulgur, ½ cup (125 mL) cooked
bread, 1 slice
bun, hamburger or hotdog, whole grain, ½
cereal, hot, ¾ cup (175 mL)
cereal, cold: ½ cup (125 mL)
chapati, roti, whole grain, 1 small (44 gram weight)
English muffin, ½
granola bar, plain, 1 bar (28 gram weight)
injera, ½ of a 12 inch (30 cm) round
muffin, homemade, 1 small (45 gram weight)
pancake or waffle, 1 small (4 inch or 10 cm)
pasta, couscous, ½ cup (125 mL) cooked
pita bread, ½ small (6 inches or 15 cm)
pizza, thin crust, 1/12 (12 inches or 30 cm)
quinoa, ½ cup (125 mL) cooked
rice, rice noodles, ⅓ cup (75 mL) cooked
rye crisps, 2–3 crackers (30 gram weight)
tortilla, 1 small (6 inches or 15 cm) or ½ large (10 inches or 25 cm)
whole grain crackers, 3–6 (30 gram weight)

Starchy Vegetables:

beans, lentils, split peas, ½ cup (125 mL) dried and cooked, or canned
cassava, raw, ¼ cup (60 mL)
corn, ½ cup (125 mL) or ½ cob
green peas, 1 cup (250 mL)
hummus, ⅔ cup (150 mL)
parsnips, ¾ cup (175 mL)
plantain, mashed, ⅓ cup (75 mL)
popcorn, 3 cups (750 mL)
potatoes, ½ medium or ½ cup (125 mL) baked, boiled, or mashed
soup, 1 cup (250 mL)
squash: acorn, butternut, kabocha, hubbard, ¾ cup (175 mL)
sweet potato or yam, ½ cup (125 mL) baked and cubed

Fruit

Choose fresh, frozen, or canned fruit with no added sugar. Choose whole fruit instead of juice.

fresh fruit, 1 medium (tennis ball sized)
banana, ½ large
blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, 2 cups (500 mL)
blueberries, 1 cup (250 mL)
canned and frozen fruit, no added sugar, ½ cup (125 mL)
cherries, 15
fresh fruit, cut-up, 1 cup (250 mL)
dried fruit, ¼ cup (60 mL)
grapes, 15
mango, ½ medium
melons, 1 cup (250 mL)
saskatoons, ¾ cup (175 mL)

Milk, dairy and soy products

milk, 1 cup (250 mL)
fortified soy beverage, plain, 1 cup (250 mL)

yogurt, lower fat, plain/no added sugar, ¾ cup (175 mL)
yogurt, flavoured, with added sugar, ⅓ cup (75 mL)

Foods with high sugar, fat, and salt **Limit these as they're often higher in sugar and calories, and low in nutrients.**			
BBQ sauce cakes candies chocolate cookies cranberry sauce donuts French fries	frozen yogurt gelatin desserts honey ice cream iced tea jam juice ketchup	milkshakes mochas and flavored lattes molasses muffins, store-bought pastries pies pop	potato chips powdered drink mixes relish sherbet slushes sugar sweetened drinks syrup

Foods with little or no carbohydrates

The foods below have little effect on blood sugar.

Non-starchy vegetables

- Most vegetables are low in carbohydrates, including spinach and other greens, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms, and green beans.
- Eat vegetables throughout the day.

Protein Foods

- Protein is found in meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, eggs, and beans, split peas, lentils, and soy products like tofu and edamame.
- Choose lean meats and poultry.
- Cheese is a good source of protein and calcium. It's low in carbohydrates. A portion of cheese is the size of your thumb.

- Choose fish at least 2 times per week. Avoid high mercury fish. See "For more support" section if you are unsure what types of fish are safe during pregnancy.

Fats

- Choose small amounts of unsaturated fats like canola or olive oil, non-hydrogenated margarine, nuts, and seeds, olives, and avocado.
- For added fats like oils and margarine, use the tip of your thumb as a guide to 1 serving.

Extras

- Extras are foods that are lower in calories and carbohydrates: herbs and spices, broth, coffee, and tea.

Sugar substitutes

Sugar substitutes don't raise your blood sugar. You can use sugar substitutes and foods with sugar substitutes in small amounts. For more information speak to a dietitian or search "sugar and sweeteners" at diabetes.ca.

Read labels to find out what kind of substitute is in the food you buy.

Sugar substitutes you can use in pregnancy	
Sugar substitute	**Brand name example**
acesulfame potassium (Ace-K)	Added to packaged foods and beverages
aspartame	Nutrasweet® Equal® store brands
monk fruit	Splenda® Lakanto® often combined with stevia or a sugar alcohol like erythritol
saccharin	Hermesetas®
stevia	Sugar Twin® Stevia, Truvia® Pure Via® store brands
sucralose	Splenda® Sugar Twin® Sucralose store brands
Sugar substitutes not recommended to use in pregnancy	
cyclamate	Sucaryl® Sugar Twin® Sweet N' Low® Weight Watchers® store brands

Get enough calcium from the foods and drinks you have every day

If you don't drink at least 2 cups (500 mL) of milk or fortified soy beverage a day, or eat other foods with calcium, talk to your dietitian about how to make sure you get enough. For more information go to ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts and search "Dairy Foods for Pregnancy"

Take a multivitamin pill every day

Look for these amounts when choosing a multivitamin:

- Iron between 16–27 mg
- Vitamin D at least 400 IU (10 mcg)
- Folic acid (Folate) between 0.4–1 mg (400–1000 mcg)

Healthy weight gain

Gaining a healthy amount of weight helps your baby develop and grow and lowers your risk of complications during pregnancy and birth.

Your recommended weight gain depends on your weight before pregnancy. Your healthcare provider can help you decide what a healthy amount weight gain is for you.

Trying to lose weight in pregnancy isn't recommended.

Be active

Talk to your healthcare provider about what type and amount of activity is right for you. Being active can help manage your blood sugar while you're pregnant. Aim for 30 minutes of activity most days of the week. Activity after a meal may help keep your blood sugar from rising too high.

For more support

- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a self-referral form on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit Nutrition for Pregnancy & Lactation (www.ahs.ca/nutrition/Page18358.aspx)
- For general information about eating during pregnancy, go to ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts and search "pregnancy".

Sample meal and snack ideas

The meal ideas on this page show how you can use some of the eating choices in this handout. These are examples only–the best meals for you may look different from these. There is space to write your own ideas.

Breakfast	# of carbohydrate choices	My ideas
1 whole grain English muffin 1 cup (250 mL) milk 1 egg scrambled with: ½ ounce (15 grams) cheese ½ cup (125 mL) onions, tomato, mushrooms	2 1	
Snack		
1 medium orange and ¼ cup (60 mL) walnut halves	1	
Lunch		
1 cup (250 mL) lentil soup 3–6 whole grain crackers (30 grams) ¾ cup (175 mL) plain or no added sugar yogurt with ½ cup (125 mL) berries ½ cup (125 mL) carrots	1-2 1 1	
Snack		
1 cup (250 mL) carrots, celery, cucumbers with ¼ cup (60 mL) hummus and 2–3 rye crisps	1	
Supper		
2½ ounces (75 grams) baked salmon 1 cup (250 mL) brown rice, cooked ½ cup (125 mL) steamed green beans 1 tsp (5 mL) soft, non-hydrogenated margarine ½ a sliced tomato 1 cup (250 mL) cantaloupe, cut up	 3 1	
Snack		
1 slice whole grain toast with 2 tsp (10 mL) peanut butter 1 cup (250 mL) of milk	1 1	

Examples of Snacks (each bullet is 1 snack)		
Daytime snacks		
• 1 apple, sliced, with cinnamon • 3 cups (750 mL) plain popcorn with herbs • 3–6 (30 grams) whole grain crackers • 1 cup (250 mL) berries with ¾ cup (175 mL) plain yogurt	1 1 1 2	
Evening snacks		
• ½ whole wheat pita, with 1 ounce (30 grams) cheese, and a medium pear • ¼ cup (60 mL) cottage cheese with ½ cup (125 mL) pineapple chunks, drained • 1 slice whole grain bread with peanut butter	2 1 1	

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