NHS

Royal Cornwall Hospitals

NHS Trust

Diabetes - planning your pregnancy

Information for patients

Outstanding
Care for **One+All**

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for women with diabetes who are thinking about starting a family. Most women with diabetes have normal pregnancies resulting in healthy babies. However, if your diabetes is not well controlled, it may make it more difficult to conceive and maintain your pregnancy. This leaflet provides advice to follow before becoming pregnant, and explains the possible risks of pregnancy if your diabetes is not kept under control.

Will my treatment need to change?

Control of your blood glucose is very important at the time of conception.

If your diabetes is treated with:

- **insulin** – you may need to change your insulin dose or even the number of injections you take to improve your control
- **tablets** – you may be advised to replace these with insulin injections before becoming pregnant
- **diet only** – you may need insulin at some stage before or during pregnancy.

What are the possible risks?

If your diabetes is not properly controlled prior to and during pregnancy a number of problems may occur:

- **miscarriage** – there is a higher risk associated with poor control
- **congenital abnormalities** – in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy the baby's main organs are developing. Poorly controlled diabetes may cause damage to your developing baby (double the risk)
- **stillbirth** – poorly controlled diabetes during pregnancy increases the risk of stillbirth (five times more likely)
- **large babies (macrosomia)** – poorly controlled diabetes can lead to 'large for date' babies. This can cause problems for both mother and baby at delivery, increased risk of needing help with forceps or ventouse (suction), or caesarean section and shoulder dystocia (difficulty delivering the baby's shoulders)
- **respiratory distress** – poorly controlled diabetes can cause a reduced production of lung surfactant (a protein needed for the lungs to function properly in newborns). Immaturity of lungs may lead to a condition called respiratory distress syndrome (breathing difficulties in the newborn).

Before you become pregnant

Blood glucose control – your blood glucose should be as near normal as possible for three months prior to pregnancy. Aim for levels 4-7.8 mmol/l.

HbA1c – your long term control should ideally be no higher than 48 mmol/l.

Folic acid – to reduce the risks of spina bifida, take folic acid supplements three months before and continue for the first three months of pregnancy. For women with diabetes the recommended dose is 5mg tablets (instead of the usual 400 mcg tablets for women without diabetes). This higher dose is only available on prescription.

Contraception – it is advisable to continue with a form of contraception until your diabetes is under control.

Medications – if you take certain blood pressure medications, these may need to be changed. You may also need to stop taking any cholesterol lowering tablets. Certain medications may be harmful to the developing baby if taken during pregnancy. Please seek advice before stopping or changing any medications.

General advice

- **Smoking** – if you smoke try to give up now. Please ask for details on advice and support for this.
- **Alcohol** – if possible stop alcohol altogether and certainly limit intake to only a couple of drinks a week.
- **Rubella** – it is important that you are immune to Rubella (German Measles).

How do I plan my pregnancy?

If you are thinking about having a baby within the next 12 months:

- ask your GP to refer you to the Diabetes Preconception Service
- ask your GP to review all your medications, especially tablets for blood sugar control, blood pressure and cholesterol
- ask your GP for folic acid 5mgs daily
- start monitoring your blood glucose levels at least 4 times daily
- maintain BMI within healthy target range
- stop smoking and ask others not to smoke around you
- ask for support on food choices to provide you and your baby with the best start
- check whether you have been vaccinated against Rubella.

Contact us

If you would like an appointment to discuss pre-pregnancy care please contact the Diabetic Specialist Nurse:

- Email: cft.diabetesspecialistnurses@nhs.net

Further information

Diabetes UK

- Website: www.diabetes.org.uk

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) Diabetes in Pregnancy

- Website: www.nice.org.uk

To get this information in a different format call 01872 252690

For an online version of this leaflet please scan this QR code

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