

Testing for gestational diabetes



What is gestational diabetes?

Diabetes that develops during pregnancy is known as gestational diabetes (GDM). It usually starts in the middle or towards the end of your pregnancy although not usual it can occur before 20 weeks. It happens when your body is not able to process the hormone insulin. Gestational diabetes can cause problems for you and your baby during and after birth. But the chance of these problems happening can be reduced if it's detected and well managed.

Who is more likely to develop gestational diabetes?

Certain factors may increase your chance of developing gestational diabetes. At your booking appointment your midwife will check whether:-

- You have a body mass index (BMI) 30 or over
- You have given birth to a baby of 4.5kgs or above (10lbs or more)
- You have a parent, brother or sister that has diabetes
- You have had gestational diabetes in a previous pregnancy
- Your family origin is South Asian, Black Caribbean, Middle Eastern (these groups have a higher chance of developing gestational diabetes)
- You have a history of polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)

If you answer yes to any of these questions then you will be offered a glucose tolerance test, to check for gestational diabetes.

When should I have the glucose tolerance test?

The glucose tolerance test should be performed between 24–28 weeks of pregnancy, (ideally around 26 weeks)

What if I have had gestational diabetes in a previous pregnancy?

After your booking appointment with your midwife you will be offered a glucose tolerance test for as soon as possible. If the test is normal at this time then a repeat should be offered between 24–28 weeks (ideally around 26 weeks).

What is a glucose tolerance test?

This is a blood test to diagnose gestational diabetes depending on where you live the test may be performed at the GP surgery or by one of the Maternity Support Workers.

What does it involve?

The test is performed in the morning. Do not eat or drink anything, (except water) from 10pm on the day before your test. Smoking should also be avoided during this time.

1. A blood sample is taken to measure your fasting glucose level.
2. You will then be given a glucose drink. You will need to drink this within 5 minutes.
3. You will be asked to rest in the waiting area and not to smoke for the next 2 hours as this may affect the test result.
4. A further blood sample is taken 2 hours from taking the glucose solution.

Following the test you may eat and drink normally.

What if the test result confirms gestational diabetes?

If your glucose tolerance test shows that you have gestational diabetes you will be referred to the Diabetes Specialist Midwives. They will discuss diet and exercise and arrange for you to start testing your blood glucose levels.

Gestational diabetes usually improves with diet and exercise however you may need treatment with tablets or insulin injections.

Will I need extra antenatal care?

You will be offered extra scans to monitor the baby's growth and will have some extra clinic visits. The baby will need to have blood glucose checks before leaving hospital and it is recommended that you aim to stay for 24 hours after giving birth.

What are the risks of gestational diabetes?

You may be at risk of:

- having a large baby, which increases the risk of birth problems
- the baby having low blood glucose levels within the first 24 hours after birth
- having your labour induced and caesarean section
- developing diabetes in later life.

Further information

www.diabetes.org.uk – Diabetes UK

www.nice.org.uk – National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)
Diabetes in Pregnancy.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

