



Gestational diabetes symptoms and signs

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PREGNANCY TIPS AND ARTICLES

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DEC 1, 2021

Find out who is at risk of gestational diabetes during pregnancy, the symptoms, and helpful tips on healthy habits that lower one's risk of getting gestational diabetes.

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It's a constant in your body, but you only notice it when it's giving you trouble.

Insulin is a hormone that helps to control our blood sugar levels. During pregnancy, your placenta produces several hormones, some of which may affect the body's production and function of insulin. For some pregnant women, this lowered insulin efficiency may lead to abnormally high levels of blood sugar - it's what causes *gestational diabetes*.

As the pregnancy progresses, mum-to-be will need more insulin to keep her blood glucose in the 'safe' zone. This is why gestational diabetes is more common in the second or third trimester and generally develops after the 20th week of pregnancy².

In Singapore, gestational diabetes is usually diagnosed in between 15 and 20 per cent

of pregnancies³.

Women with gestational diabetes are at a higher risk of miscarriage, pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure during pregnancy), a difficult delivery, and wound or bleeding issues after delivery. And their babies are at a higher risk of premature birth or stillbirth, birth defects, a birth injury during delivery, as well as postnatal issues such as jaundice and low blood glucose.⁴

Also, women who've had gestational diabetes are more prone to getting type 2 diabetes later in life.⁵

In Singapore, all pregnant women can benefit from free screening for gestational diabetes through an oral glucose tolerance test. This takes place between weeks 24 and 28 of pregnancy⁶.

In most cases, gestational diabetes disappears in the first few weeks after baby is born, as blood sugar levels usually return to normal after delivery. But because gestational diabetes can cause issues for both you and baby, it's crucial to know the risks associated with it.

Who is at risk of gestational diabetes?

It's not clear why some women develop this condition, but the statistics show that you have a higher risk of developing it if:⁷

- You were overweight before you conceived
- You gained excess weight during pregnancy
- You have a first-degree relative (parent/sibling/child) with diabetes
- You were over 35 when you got pregnant
- You had gestational diabetes in a previous pregnancy or pre-diabetes (slightly elevated blood sugar) before you got pregnant.
- You previously gave birth to a baby who weighed more than 4kg

What are the symptoms of gestational diabetes?

While there are no typical signs of gestational diabetes, women may notice some bodily changes that happen when their blood sugar levels are high:⁸

- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- A dry mouth

- Tiredness
- Recurring/persistent thrush (yeast infections)

Tips for preventing gestational diabetes

It's impossible to control factors such as a family history or an advanced maternal age. However, you can develop healthy habits that lower your risk of getting gestational diabetes.

Stay active. Exercising helps your body burn glucose, and encourages healthier blood sugar levels. Try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days. It doesn't have to be anything too complicated; go for a brisk walk or a swim, or ride a bike. Or just fit in a 15-minute walk after each meal. Check with your doctor about the best form of exercise for you.

Maintain your weight. You're growing a human being in your body, so you'll inevitably put on weight. Speak with your doctor about the amount of weight you should be putting on and keep an eye on that number.

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