

# Healthy eating for gestational diabetes

## Patient information factsheet

### Introduction

- This patient guide explains how to manage your blood glucose levels during gestational diabetes (high blood sugar that develops during pregnancy and usually disappears after giving birth).
- Making changes to your diet and doing regular physical activities are important as they help keep your blood glucose under control.
- If you have gestational diabetes, you are advised to keep blood glucose levels to below the following:
  - **Fasting (for example before breakfast): 5.3 mmol/L**
  - **1 hour after eating: 7.8 mmol/L**
- It is important to keep your blood glucose levels within these target ranges, as this will help to reduce the risks to you and your baby.
- One of the best ways to manage gestational diabetes is to have a healthy and balanced diet.
- The foods you choose are just as important as monitoring your blood glucose and taking any prescribed medication.
- The Eatwell Plate is a tool that can help you get a balanced diet. You can view an interactive version of the Eatwell Guide at:
 

[www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx)

The British Heart Foundation has great healthy meal options and recipes from all over the world <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/support/healthy-living/healthy-eating/recipe-finder>
- If you cannot visit that website, or do not have access to the internet, someone in the dietician team can print these out for you.

## Tips for managing blood glucose levels

### 1) Eat three meals per day, and avoid skipping meals

- Leaving long gaps between eating can make it difficult to manage hunger and blood glucose levels.

### 2) Avoid sugary foods and drinks

- Try not to eat processed foods, especially sugary drinks, snacks and desserts. Eating these can cause your glucose levels to rise.
- Do not add sugar to foods and drinks.
- Instead, try low or zero calorie sweeteners, also known as artificial sweeteners.
- You don't need to buy special 'diabetic' foods. They can be expensive, high in calories and often contain sweeteners that may cause stomach upset.

### 3) Eat the right amount and type of carbohydrates

- When you eat carbohydrate foods they turn into glucose, which affects blood glucose levels straight away.
- Your body relies on these foods as a source of energy.
- Carbohydrates are in many foods, including:
  - Breads, chapatti, roti, pita bread, bagels (anything made with flour)
  - Rice, pasta, noodles, couscous, quinoa, barley
  - Breakfast cereals, cereal bars and crackers
  - Fruit and starchy vegetables like sweet potato, potato, yam, plantain
  - Beans and legumes
  - Milk and yogurt
  - Sugary foods and drinks.
- To manage your blood glucose levels, it is important to eat the right **type** and **portion size** of carbohydrate rich foods.

## Types of carbohydrate

- Some carbohydrates are broken down more slowly, which can help your blood glucose levels stay even.
- Glycaemic Index (GI) is a measure of how quickly foods containing carbohydrates affect your blood sugar levels after you eat them.

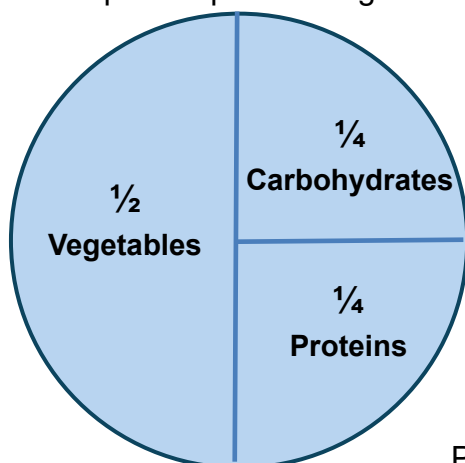
- Food and drinks with a high glycaemic index are broken down quickly, causing a quick rise in glucose levels.
- It is important to choose **lower** glycaemic index carbohydrates as they are more slowly absorbed into the body.

Glycaemic Index food swaps	
Instead of these high-GI foods:	Try these low-GI foods instead:
Flaked/puffed or sugar-coated cereal	No added sugar or nutty Muesli
Soft white bread	Multi-grain/seeded/rye/sourdough bread
White pitta	Mixed grain wrap or wholemeal roti
Instant oats	Traditional rolled oats/jumbo oats
Mashed potato	New potatoes, sweet potato or yams
White rice	Long grain basmati rice, quinoa or wholemeal rice
Frozen chips	Wholemeal pasta or noodles
Watermelon	Apple, peach, berries

- Remember portion sizes matter and not all low glycaemic index foods are healthy, so be sure to check the labels and make healthy choices.
- You can find more information about glycaemic index online at the Diabetes UK: [www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/enjoy-food/carbohydrates-and-diabetes/glycaemic-index-and-diabetes](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/enjoy-food/carbohydrates-and-diabetes/glycaemic-index-and-diabetes)

### Portion size of carbohydrates

- You may be advised to eat less carbohydrate rich foods, as large portions can give you high blood glucose levels.
- Use this portion plate as a guide:



- Carbohydrates are an important part of the diet, so be careful not to cut them out completely.
- This is only a guide, and you may find that these amounts are not exactly right for you.
- If you are worried about your carbohydrate portions, please ask to speak to a Dietitian.

#### 4) Snacks

- Snacks may be needed if you are hungry between meals, especially if you are eating less carbohydrates at mealtimes.
- As a guide we recommend you only have two or three 10 to 15g carbohydrate snack portions per day. Some examples include:
  - 1 small handful of unsalted nuts/seeds
  - 1 fruit portion
  - 150g of plain natural yoghurt or Greek yogurt
  - 2 wholegrain crackers with cheese
  - Vegetable sticks with a tablespoon of humous or cream cheese
- For more snack options please refer to our snack guide leaflet.  
<https://www.whittington.nhs.uk/document.ashx?id=14117>

#### 5) Fruit and vegetables

- You can eat as many vegetables as you want without affecting your blood glucose levels.  
**1 portion of vegetables** = 3 tablespoons of cooked vegetables or 1 small bowl of salad.
- Fruit should be limited to 3 portions per day and spread throughout the day.  
**1 portion of fruit (80g)** = 1 medium orange, 1 small banana or 1 plum.

#### 6) Protein

Eat a minimum of 2 to 3 portions of high protein food daily.

##### One portion equals

- 80g meat (a portion about the size of a deck of cards)
- 120g fish (a portion about the size of the palm of your hand for white fish. A portion about the size of a deck of cards for oily fish e.g. salmon, sardines)

- 2 eggs
- 3 to 4 tablespoons of pulses (for example lentils, beans, chickpeas)
- 100g Quorn or tofu (1/2 cup)
- 1 small, cupped handful of plain nuts.

## 7) Calcium

Eat 3 portions of foods with a lot of calcium daily.

### One portion is:

- 200ml milk or fortified alternatives
- 150g yoghurt – natural or Greek
- 25g cheese (about the size of a matchbox).

Non-dairy foods that contain calcium:

- Calcium enriched soya products
- Green leafy vegetables
- Tofu
- Almonds
- Beans
- Dahl.

## 8) Fats

Reduce your intake of saturated fats.

- Fat does not affect your blood glucose levels directly but eating too much can cause weight gain. This can make it more difficult to control your blood glucose levels.
- Butter, cheese, ghee, lard and palm oil are all high in saturated fat. Swap these for low-fat alternatives and small amounts of olive oil, rapeseed oil, sunflower oils or spreads.

## 9) Keep active

- Research has shown that physical activity after a meal is particularly useful in managing blood glucose levels.
- Try to do a 20-minute walk after meals.
- Regular exercise also will help to keep you fit and prepares you for the birth of your baby.

- The most important thing about physical activity is that you do something that you enjoy.
- **Before starting or continuing any new kind of physical activity, always check with your health care professional team.**

## Example meal plan

### Breakfast examples

- 1 slice of wholemeal bread with topping (for example eggs, cheese, peanut butter, avocado, cooked ham, houmous)
- Omelette (add vegetables of choice) and 1 slice wholemeal bread
- 200g natural Greek yogurt with a handful of nuts/seeds and handful of berries
- 1 small chapatti with curry (meat/chicken/paneer)

### Lunch examples

- 2 slices of wholemeal bread with chicken/tuna/cheese/egg and salad
- 1 wholemeal wrap with chicken/tuna/cheese/egg and salad
- 2 small (hand size) chapattis with curry and vegetables/salad
- Chicken & vegetable soup and 1 wholemeal pitta bread
- Lentil soup with 1 slice wholemeal bread
- Scrambled eggs with avocado and 2 slices of wholemeal bread

### Evening meal examples (check the portion plate diagram above)

- Fist size of wholemeal pasta, with beef bolognese and salad
- Fist size of sweet potato, with baked fish and vegetables
- Chicken fajitas made with 2 small wholemeal wraps and vegetables
- Fist size of basmati rice, with curry (meat/chicken/paneer) and vegetables/salad
- Fist-size portion of noodles, with tofu/tempeh/chicken/prawns and vegetables

The Diabetes UK website (see below) contains low carbohydrate recipe ideas.

## Additional useful information

Diabetes UK:

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/diabetes-the-basics/food-and-diabetes/i-have-gestational-diabetes>

British Dietetic Association food facts sheet:

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/pregnancy-diet.html>

Eatwell guides:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide>

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/support/healthy-living/healthy-eating/recipe-finder>

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## Contact our service

- This leaflet should be used with the advice you receive during your pregnancy from your diabetes specialist Dietitian.
- Please do not hesitate to contact the Dietitian on 020 7288 5552 if you have any dietary questions or concerns.

## Contact our Trust

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 7288 5551** or [whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net).

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet, please email [whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net). We will try our best to meet your needs.

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