

What Happens In Gestational Diabetes?

Gestational Diabetes is one of the most common health problems that can happen during pregnancy. It affects as many as twelve percent of pregnancies in Ireland and can lead to a serious problems for both mom and baby.

If you are diagnosed, there are day to day changes you can make to stay healthy. How much exercise you get and what kind of foods you eat can have important effects on your health and your baby's health.

But what happens when you have gestational diabetes and how can diet and exercise help?

Food and drinks are broken down in your digestive system. The sugar they contain is absorbed into your bloodstream. But sugar needs insulin to work. Insulin is made by the pancreas and helps sugar get into your cells. Insulin acts like a key that lets the sugar move from the blood stream into this cells of your body where it is used for energy.

Pregnancy hormones change the way insulin works in your body. In the later stages of pregnancy, these changes make it difficult for insulin to unlock the cells and allow the sugar to enter. This is what is known as insulin resistance.

Some insulin resistance is normal in pregnancy but this means your pancreas needs to work extra hard to keep blood sugar levels in a healthy range. When you have gestational diabetes your pancreas is not able to keep up. As a result too much sugar is left in the blood.

However a carefully planned diet with high fibre carbohydrates and no added sugar can make it easier for your body to manage this sugar in your blood. Exercise will also help keep blood sugar low as it improves insulin's ability to unlock the cells and uses up sugar for energy.

If blood sugar is controlled your chances of a healthy pregnancy are the same as a non diabetic mother. This makes diet and exercise powerful tools for a healthy pregnancy.

However if blood sugar is not well controlled this can lead to problems in both mom and baby.

In a study of 23,000 pregnant women around the world, researchers found a link between high blood sugar in mom and babies that had grown too big. Researchers also found a link between high blood sugar and pre-eclampsia,

premature delivery, need for caesarean section, birth injury and abnormal sugar control in baby. Diabetes during pregnancy can also put you and your baby at risk for problems later in life including Type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

But there are actions you can take. Changes and diet and exercise combined with close monitoring can successfully manage blood sugar in seven out of ten pregnancies. So no better time to start than now!

(Credit: Thank you to the Health Research Board in Ireland for letting us use this video.)