

PATIENT INFORMATION

Gestational Diabetes

A Guide to Insulin in pregnancy



Why do I need insulin?

It is important for your baby that your blood glucose stays below 5.3 mmol before breakfast and below 7.8 mmol one hour (taken from the end of the meal) after meals for the majority of the time during the rest of your pregnancy.

You have been working on your diet and made all the changes that you can but you need a bit more help by giving yourself insulin as well as keeping up with the changes in your diet.

What is insulin?

Insulin is a naturally occurring hormone and helps regulate blood glucose levels. During pregnancy women need to produce more insulin because of the extra demands on the body. Some women have to take insulin to help keep their blood glucose levels inside the recommended glucose ranges.

(Fasting 4 to 5.3 mmols)
(1 hour after meals below 7.8 mmols)

What does insulin do?

Adding (clear) insulin before meals (topping up your own insulin) stops the rise in glucose levels after food.

The bedtime (cloudy) insulin tops up your insulin and works with your own body's glucose, which is naturally released during the night, stopping the morning glucose levels being above the recommended limits.

How is insulin given?

Insulin is given by a small injection of insulin in to the fat of the outer thigh area or bottom. You will be shown how to do this in clinic.

When do I give it?

Meal time insulin: Inject it 5 to 10 minutes before your meal (or within 5 to 10 minutes after if you are suffering with sickness). **Never** have your meal time insulin then not eat.

Bed time Insulin: Inject it just before going to bed.

Will it hurt?

People generally comment that the insulin injection hurts less than the blood glucose monitoring. If you find it too uncomfortable you can hold some ice to the area you plan on injecting for a minute before you inject insulin.

Do I still have to monitor my blood sugars?

Yes, this will tell you and the healthcare staff that the insulin level is right for you at this time in your pregnancy.

Disposal of needles etc.?

Use the sharps bin that we will provide you with. You can also obtain these from your local council.

Where do I keep the insulin?

The stock should be kept in the salad drawer or in the door of the fridge.

Keep the injection devices you are using at room temperature (away from direct heat)

Do I still have to be careful with what I eat?

Yes, you still need to follow the advice that the dietitians have spoken to you about.

Will the insulin dose change during the pregnancy?

It is not uncommon to have to increase the insulin as the pregnancy progresses. You will have help and advice with this.

Who do I need to inform?

It is law that you inform the DVLA if you hold a driving licence and you are going to be on insulin for more than 3 months either during or after delivery of your baby. Your insurance company should also be notified. This should not make any difference to either of these.

What should I do if my glucose levels rise above the recommended range?

Nothing – but think about what you have eaten. What may have caused it?

If it is always higher after one meal in the day and it is not connected with eating more carbohydrates than usual, you may need to increase your insulin dose at that meal in the future. This will be discussed in clinic or you can call the Diabetes Team on the numbers on your orange Antenatal notes.

What are the side effects of giving insulin?

Insulin stops your blood glucose going too high which is why you are giving it, **but** it can cause your blood glucose levels to drop below 4 mmols. If this happens you may experience a feeling of light headedness, shaking, blurred vision or sweating. This is your body letting you know that your blood glucose is dropping below 4mmols.

What can I do if my blood sugar goes below 4 mmols?

Have something sugary like 3-5 glucose tablets or 5-6 jelly babies, 200ml of Lucozade Original or 200ml of coca cola. Repeat this until the symptoms stop and your blood glucose is back to 4 mmols. Then have a biscuit, piece of fruit or your meal. Think about why this might have happened. Is it because you had less carbohydrate with the insulin? Were you more active (shopping etc.) at this time of day?

Do I still have my insulin with my next meal?

Yes the insulin is to stop the rise of glucose after food so it is needed at that meal. But you could take the insulin immediately after food rather than before if you are worried.

Can I stop the insulin after the baby is born?

Immediately the baby is born most mums can stop the insulin, however for some women it may be needed for a short while depending on the way the baby is delivered. This will be discussed during your clinic visit.

Do I have to monitor blood sugars after the baby is born?

We may advise women to test their blood sugars for 1-2 days after delivery to ensure their glucose levels have returned to normal. If you find they haven't, contact us.

Your GP should ask you to have a fasting blood glucose at the surgery 6 weeks after the birth and then yearly to keep a check on your glucose levels.

Will I need insulin if I get pregnant again?

It is more than likely that you will need insulin when you are next pregnant. At that time mention it to your midwife and he/she will advise you or you can phone us.

Will I develop diabetes when I get older?

Having gestational diabetes indicates that you are at **risk** of developing Type 2 diabetes in the future.

Once you have had your baby, to try to delay or avoid type 2 diabetes it is important that you make lifestyle changes such as losing weight and increasing activity. Your Primary Care Team will be able to give you advice and support after you have had the baby, you may also find the websites below useful.

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/healthy-lifestyles/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/start-the-nhs-weight-loss-plan/>

Notes

Useful telephone numbers:

Diabetes Specialist Nurse: 01803 655525

Dietitian: 01803 654384

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet ring the Diabetes Specialist Nurses on the number given above.

Post Delivery Weight Management Support;

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/healthy-lifestyles/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/start-the-nhs-weight-loss-plan/>

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.