



# Eating Well with Diabetes in Pregnancy

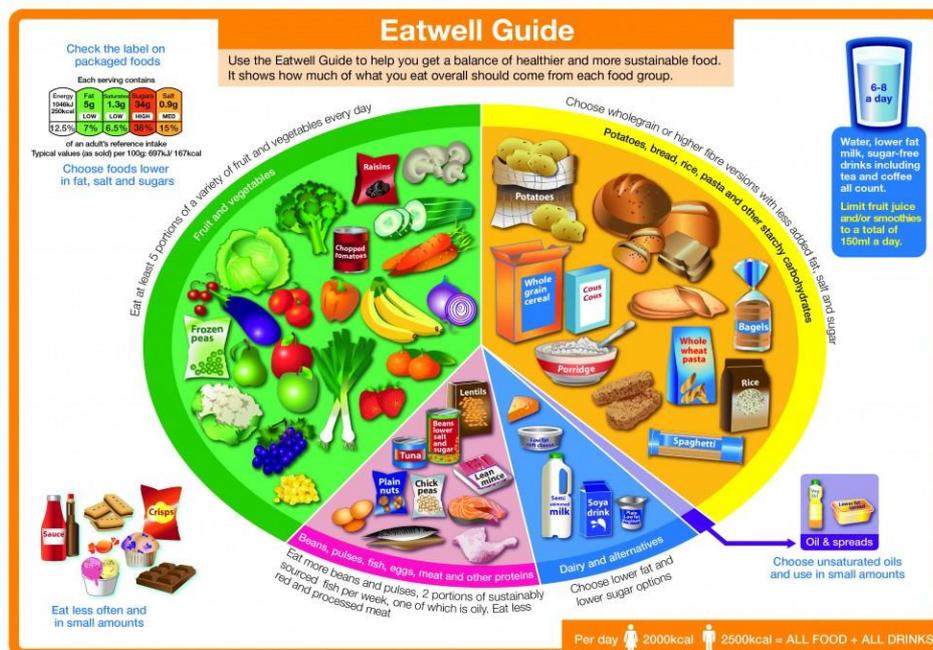
Gestational diabetes is a type of diabetes diagnosed during pregnancy. Our blood glucose (or sugar) levels are normally controlled by a hormone called insulin. In diabetes, there is a lack of insulin and blood glucose levels rise. More insulin is needed during pregnancy, so diabetes is more likely to occur.

Regular blood glucose monitoring is essential to ensure you receive the right care and treatment. You should aim to keep your blood glucose levels to under 5.3mmol/L before meals and under 7.8mmol/L 1 hour after your meals.

Making changes to your food and drink choices and being physically active can help to achieve the above targets.

In some cases these changes may not be sufficient to control blood glucose levels and it may be necessary to have tablets or insulin injections as well.

This guide will help explain how certain foods can affect your blood glucose levels and what you can do to help manage your diabetes. In general, your diet should be healthy and well-balanced and include all the nutrients that you and your baby need. You do not need to buy any “special food”





# Diabetes

## Reduce your fat intake

A high fat intake may increase the risk of heart disease, particularly if you have type 2 diabetes. Cutting down on fat will also help you to avoid gaining too much weight during pregnancy; excess weight gain in pregnancy can reduce the effectiveness of your body's own insulin.

- Choose lean meat, chicken or turkey (no skin) and/or trim off visible fat. Keep portions of meat small. Limit fatty meats, e.g. luncheon meat, sausages, etc.
- Use semi-skimmed or skimmed milk.
- Limit cheese to about 100g/4oz per week, or try lower fat versions e.g. Edam, cottage cheese, low-fat cheese spread
- When frying or roasting, use a non-stick pan and a tiny amount of mono-unsaturated oil (e.g. olive or rapeseed oil). Grill, casserole, microwave or bake food without adding fat instead, where possible
- Choose a reduced fat spread: again, olive-based varieties are best
- Choose low-fat mayonnaises, salad dressing and sauces wherever possible and use small amounts, e.g. 1–2 tsp per serving.
- Cut down on pastry, dumplings, crisps, nuts and similar snacks.

## Carbohydrates

Carbohydrate is an important nutrient in diabetes. It is a useful source of energy as well as providing some vitamins and minerals and fibre. It is present in many foods.

All carbohydrates will release some glucose as they get digested and will cause your blood glucose level to rise. It is important to include some carbohydrate in your diet, but you may need to make changes to the types of carbohydrate you choose and reduce your portion sizes.

It may be useful to think of carbohydrate foods in the following groups.

- **Starchy carbohydrates** include bread, pasta, rice, potato, yam, noodles, breakfast cereals, chapattis, crisp breads and crackers.
- **Added Sugars** include table sugar, jam, sweets and fizzy drinks.
- **Naturally occurring sugars** are also found in fruit, fruit juice, milk, yoghurt and some dairy products.



# Diabetes

## Cut down on sugar and sugary foods and drinks

Sugar does not need to be excluded completely from your diet but it is important to avoid foods and drinks that cause a rapid rise in blood glucose levels.

- Use diet and 'no added sugar' varieties of squash and fizzy drinks. Avoid glucose/sports drinks.
- Limit/avoid high-sugar foods, e.g. cakes, biscuits, sweet puddings and chocolate.
- Use sweeteners, e.g. 'Canderel', stevia, 'Hermesetas', 'Splenda' in place of sugar.
- Avoid sugar-coated breakfast cereals, e.g. frosted flakes, sugary puffs and hoops, chocolate-flavoured cereals.
- Bedtime drinks e.g. 'Horlicks', 'Ovaltine' and drinking chocolate (including low-fat varieties) are high in sugar. Diet versions e.g. 'Highlights' and 'Options' can be used.
- Jams and marmalades, including reduced-sugar versions, should be spread thinly, if needed.
- Be careful with low fat cakes and puddings – these often have extra sugar in place of the fat.

## Starchy Carbohydrates

You can include a *medium-sized* portion of one of the following foods with each meal. The choices marked with a ☺ are especially good as they tend to be digested more slowly causing a smaller rise in blood glucose and can keep you feeling full for longer. These are known as "low glycaemic index (GI)" foods.

- **Breakfast Cereals** – e.g. porridge☺, unsweetened muesli☺, fruit and fibre, Shreddies, Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, Special K.
- **Bread** – e.g. granary☺, seeded☺, multi-grain☺, wholemeal, high-fibre, white, pitta, rye☺, chapatti☺, naan.
- **Starchy vegetables** – boiled, jacket or mashed potato, sweet potatoes☺, oven chips, yam.
- **Pasta and Noodles.** All kinds☺
- **Crackers** - Crackers, rye crispbread☺, oatcakes
- **Rice and other Grains** – e.g. basmati rice☺, couscous, bulgar wheat☺, white or brown rice.

Your dietitian can provide further advice on portion size and glycaemic index if required.



# Diabetes

## Increase your intake of fruit and vegetables

These contain good quantities of fibre, are low in fat and are also high in vitamins and minerals, which are important for long-term health. The aim is to eat *at least* 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day – the more variety the better.

### What is a portion?

Half a grapefruit or mango
One medium apple, pear, peach or orange, small banana, slice of melon, peach, handful of grapes, large handful (6oz/150g) berries
Two small fruits e.g. clementines, satsumas, kiwi, plums
2-3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables, including pulses/dhal
Small bowl of salad
Small glass of unsweetened fruit juice or smoothie (this may need to be avoided as it contains lots of natural sugar which can cause a rise in blood glucose levels)

- Because fruit contains natural sugars, it is a good idea to limit the daily amount you have to 2-3 portions spread throughout the day. You can use vegetables and salad to meet the 5 portion per day target.
- If using tinned fruit choose those tinned in natural juice rather than syrup.
- Take care not to overcook vegetables – this can destroy the vitamin and mineral content.
- The nutrient content of frozen vegetables is just as good as fresh.



# Diabetes

## Dairy Foods

Milk and dairy foods are an important source of calcium.

Although milk and yoghurts contain natural sugar these foods have a low GI and therefore, the sugar is absorbed more slowly.

You should aim to have 3 portions of dairy foods per day.

One portion is provided by: - 200mls (1 glass) milk, 150g yoghurt or 30g cheese

You should aim to choose low fat dairy foods where possible, but you may find that some low fat products have added sugar. This can often be the case with yoghurts; the best choice is natural yogurt including the higher protein natural yogurts such as Greek strained yogurt and Icelandic yogurt.

Other non-dairy foods contain some calcium; these include, tahini, green leafy vegetables, broccoli, tofu, whitebait, beans, dhal, sardines and almonds. However the amount of calcium in a portion of these foods can be much lower than that in a portion of dairy foods so you would need to eat more of these ones.

If you are using an alternative to cow's milk, e.g. soya milk or nut milk please ensure that it is fortified with calcium.

## Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

These foods provide our main sources of protein; many also provide us with iron. Other protein-rich foods are nuts and seeds, soya, tofu and Quorn.

Aim to include foods from this group twice per day.

Try to eat one portion of oily fish per week; these fish contain a special kind of fat called long-chain omega-3 fatty acids. This type of fat may help to prevent heart disease and also in pregnancy can help a baby's nervous system develop.

A portion is around 140g (when cooked) and the following fish are good sources:- Anchovies, carp, herring, mackerel, pilchards, salmon, sardines, sprats, trout, fresh tuna and whitebait.

**This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email [patient.information@gwh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@gwh.nhs.uk)**



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