

Physical activity advice for women with Gestational Diabetes Mellitus during Pregnancy

Patient Information Leaflet



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What is Gestational Diabetes Mellitus?

Gestational diabetes (GDM) is a condition where the glucose (sugar) in the blood is higher than normal. GDM is one of the most common health problems for pregnant women. It is usually picked up in the second or third trimester of pregnancy.

Why does this happen?

A hormone called insulin normally controls the amount of glucose in the blood. High levels of pregnancy hormones released by your placenta work against your insulin, so your body has to make more insulin than normal to manage your blood sugar levels.

Some women can't make that extra insulin required and blood glucose levels become too high, which results in gestational diabetes mellitus.

High blood glucose levels can lead to complications for both you and your baby.

The good news is it can be treated and you can have a perfectly healthy pregnancy.

Healthy lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise can help manage this condition throughout pregnancy and afterwards.

This booklet will give you information on safe exercise options during pregnancy.

How does keeping active help to control my blood glucose levels?

When you have gestational diabetes your blood glucose levels tend to be higher than normal.

Moderate physical activity or exercise can help lower blood glucose levels in two ways:

1

When you exercise your muscles use up glucose from the bloodstream and so blood glucose levels fall.

2

After activity your muscles remain more sensitive to the effects of insulin, which means your blood sugars stay lower for longer.

Even a 10 minute 'brisk' walk after meals has been shown to help control glucose levels.

Many women find it hard to control their blood glucose levels from diet alone. It can be helpful to introduce more physical activity into your daily routine as well.

Benefits of physical activity:

- Improved heart and lung fitness
- Helps prevent excessive weight gain during pregnancy
- Reduces the risk of blood pressure issues
- Improves your mood, and reduces anxiety/stress levels
- Helps you get a better night sleep and have more energy

Is it safe to exercise during pregnancy?

Yes, if you are healthy and your pregnancy is normal it is safe to continue or start physical activity.

It is still important to discuss exercise with your GP or obstetrician during your antenatal visits. If they give you the OK to exercise, you can discuss what activities you can do safely.

What are the daily recommendations for exercise during pregnancy?

Pregnant women should engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week.

What is Moderate intensity?

This means you are moving enough to increase your heart rate and start sweating. You should still be able to talk normally, but not sing.

How can I complete 150 minutes of physical activity per week?

- ◆ If you were active prior to the pregnancy, you can continue to do the same physical activity as long as you feel comfortable (exceptions: contact sport/ deep sea diving) You may need to modify the intensity or type of physical activity at a later stage of pregnancy.
- ◆ 150 minutes can be divided into 30 minutes five times per week.
- ◆ The 30 minutes per day can be further divided into 2x15 minutes or 3x10 minutes

I'm not currently active, or I am not new to Physical activity, how do I start?

If you are new to physical activity or have not exercised for a period of time, start gradually. Speak with your GP before engaging in physical activity if you have any concerns.

You can begin with as little as 5 minutes per day and gradually build up to 30 minutes per day (as tolerated)

Example: 15- 30 minutes broken up throughout the day

- ◆ 5-10 minute brisk walk after your breakfast
- ◆ 5-10 minutes resistance training in the afternoon/after work. (light weights or your own bodyweight)
- ◆ 5-10 minutes brisk walk after your dinner

It is safe to continue or start physical activity during pregnancy, provided you have not been told for medical reasons not to engage in physical activity during pregnancy.

Always speak with your GP, obstetrician, midwife or physiotherapist if you have any concerns about engaging in physical activity during pregnancy.

How do I make sure I don't over exert myself?
When should I stop exercising?

- Make sure you warm up and cool down.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after activity.
- You should be able to talk but not sing during exercise. If you can no longer talk, slow down.
- If you start to get unusual symptoms while exercising, stop immediately. Seek medical attention as indicated.

Stop exercising if you get any of the following:

Dizziness or feel faint

Headache

Shortness of breath

Difficulty getting your breath while exercising

Pain or palpitations in your chest

Pain in your abdomen, back, pubic bone. Pain in your pelvic girdle

Weakness in your muscles, upper or lower limbs

Pain or swelling in your leg(s)

Painful uterine contractions or preterm labour

Fewer movements from baby

Leakage of your 'waters'

Bleeding

You should contact your healthcare provider immediately if you experience any unusual symptoms.



If you have been previously active in the past you can continue to engage in other activities during pregnancy (e.g. running). However discuss this with your healthcare provider and modify your activity as needed throughout your pregnancy.

Activities not recommended during pregnancy are:

Scuba diving, high altitude training, contact sports, skydiving, lying flat on your back, activities with increased likelihood of falling/contact.

Resistance training video for women with gestational diabetes during pregnancy:

Link to video:

https://youtu.be/rqF7iXv2mLo?si=LLeXHfLFx_MZtgMp

QR code to video:



This video is also suitable for the general antenatal population, as well as women with pelvic girdle pain (PGP).



Useful Websites:

CUMH website – Diabetes in Pregnancy -
<https://irelandsouthwid.cumh.hse.ie/support-services/diabetes-in-pregnancy/>

Acknowledgments:

2019 Canadian guideline for physical activity throughout pregnancy

