

Diabetes is a disease caused by **levels of sugar in the blood being too high**. This occurs because the body does not produce enough insulin or cannot use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone made by the pancreas that turns into energy or stores it as fat.

There are several types of diabetes. In **type 1 diabetes**, the body does not make insulin and it is usually diagnosed in children and young adults. In **type 2 diabetes**, the body either does not make enough insulin or is unable to use the insulin it has. Pregnant women who have never had diabetes before but who have high blood sugar levels during pregnancy have **gestational diabetes**. Regardless of the type, diabetes is a serious disease but can be treated. Some people with diabetes need to take medicine or insulin to control their blood sugar and prevent problems. **For people with type 1 or type 2 diabetes, untreated high blood sugar levels can damage organs, including blood vessels, nerves, eyes, and kidneys.**

## Did you know?

- About 1% of women of childbearing age have diabetes before pregnancy
- In 2007, 3% of women in Arizona developed diabetes during pregnancy (gestational diabetes)
- Having diabetes in pregnancy can increase your chance of staying a diabetic after having a baby, or getting diabetes later in life
- By keeping your blood sugar levels normal, you can lead a healthy life and are more likely to have a healthy pregnancy

Diabetes can also cause a number of risks to a developing baby. These risks can be greatly reduced with good blood sugar control starting before pregnancy.

- **Birth defects:** If you have high blood sugar in the early weeks of pregnancy, you may be three to four times more likely to have a baby with a serious birth defect. These include heart defects or birth defects of the brain or spinal cord
- **Miscarriage:** High blood sugar levels around the time of getting pregnant may increase your risk of miscarriage
- **Premature birth** (baby born before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy): Premature babies have a higher risk of health problems during their first month of life as well as a risk for long-term disabilities
- **Macrosomia:** High blood sugar may also increase your risk of having a very large baby (10 pounds or more). A large baby can be more difficult to deliver vaginally and may put the baby at risk for injury
- **Stillbirth:** This is when a baby dies inside of the mother's uterus after 20 weeks of pregnancy but before their birth. Though stillbirth is rare, the risk is increased with high levels of blood sugar
- **Newborn problems:** These include breathing problems, low blood sugar levels, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin)
- **Obesity and diabetes:** Babies born to women with diabetes may be at an increased risk of developing obesity and diabetes as young adults

## Reducing Risk

If you have diabetes, or have had gestational diabetes in a previous pregnancy, make sure you **talk to your doctor before trying to get pregnant.**

- It is important to **keep your blood sugar levels in a normal range before pregnancy**
- Discuss with your doctor how you can reach a healthy weight before you become pregnant
- Discuss with your doctor the safest time to get pregnant
- If planning to get pregnant, your doctor may switch your oral diabetes medicine to insulin
- **Take a multivitamin with 400-800 micrograms of the B vitamin folic acid**, starting at least one month before pregnancy, to lower the risk of birth defects
- **See a dentist regularly.** Bad oral health can make blood sugar harder to control
- **Engage in least 30 minutes** of moderate exercise each day

## Keep In Mind

- Talk to your doctor if you have diabetes and are thinking about getting pregnant (or are not taking steps to avoid pregnancy). He/she may change your medications, make suggestions for losing weight, and watch your blood sugar levels more closely
- Untreated diabetes can be dangerous to both you and your baby. Make sure you have it under control before you get pregnant
- If you have had gestational diabetes in a previous pregnancy, talk to your doctor before getting pregnant again
- Take a multivitamin with 400 - 800 micrograms of folic acid in it. Talk to your doctor about whether you need more than 400 micrograms

## Health Care Provider Instructions

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## My Next Steps

I will take steps to make sure my blood sugar levels are under control before I get pregnant. This includes doing the following:

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- If I get pregnant, I will work closely with my doctor to make sure my blood sugar levels stay under control
- If I am taking medicine, and I get pregnant, I will talk to my doctor right away to see whether my medication may need to be changed
- I will talk to my doctor about how much folic acid is right for me and take it every day

## References:

Content adapted from March of Dimes - [www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com)

American Diabetes Association - [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) or (800) 342-2383

Arizona Department of Health Services - [www.azdhs.gov](http://www.azdhs.gov)

This material is for information purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Materials adapted from "Every Woman, Every Time" developed by Sutter Medical Center Sacramento with funding from March of Dimes CA Chapter and "Healthy Women Florida" developed by the Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Family and Community Health.

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