

Healthy Eating for Pregnancy When You Have Diabetes

This handout provides nutrition tips to help you manage your blood sugar during your pregnancy.

If you have diabetes and you are pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant, talk to your healthcare team. **They can work with you to manage your blood sugar to help keep you and your baby healthy.**

Managing your blood sugars during pregnancy can help lower the risk of:

- miscarriage
- birth defects
- having your baby grow too large
- your baby having low blood sugar and breathing problems at birth

Healthy meal planning

Fill your plate like the one below to spread carbohydrates over the day and get the nutrients you and baby needs.



- Cover $\frac{1}{2}$ your plate with non-starchy vegetables. A portion of fruit may also be included in this part of the plate.
- Put whole grain products or starchy vegetables on $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate. Some starchy vegetables are potatoes, yams, corn, squash, and parsnips.

- Put protein foods on $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate. Some protein foods are meat, fish, eggs, cheese, and tofu.
- Have milk, fortified soy beverage or yogurt with some of your meals or snacks.
- When you're thirsty, choose water.

Spread carbohydrates over the day

Carbohydrates are important for your baby's growth and development. Because they affect your blood sugar, it's important to spread carbohydrates over the day into 3 meals, with snacks as needed.

Example of carbohydrate foods are:

- beans and lentils
- fruits
- grains
- milk and yogurt
- starchy vegetables
- sugar and sweet foods

Count carbohydrates and read labels

Knowing how much carbohydrate is in food can help you to manage your blood sugar.

Find out how much carbohydrate is in your meals and snacks from food lists in other diabetes handouts, food labels, apps, online nutrition counters, or a nutrition scale.

Search "[label reading](#) and [carbohydrate counting](#)" on ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts

Taking Insulin?

If you take insulin, matching the amount of insulin you take with the carbohydrate you eat will help manage your blood sugars after meals.

The amount of insulin you will require in pregnancy will change on a regular basis as your hormone levels change. Work with your healthcare team to manage your insulin to prevent low blood sugars.

Always carry fast-acting carbohydrates with you to treat lows. If you're not sure how to treat low blood sugar, talk to your diabetes team.

Glycemic Index

The glycemic index (GI) is a rating system for foods containing carbohydrates. It helps to understand how quickly carbohydrate foods increase your blood sugar after they are eaten. High GI foods will increase your blood sugar quicker than low GI foods. Choose lower glycemic index foods more often to help manage your blood sugars. Examples of low glycemic index foods include apples, pears, berries, barley, quinoa, sweet potato, milk, or plain yogurt. For more information speak to a dietitian or search “[glycemic index](#)” at [diabetes.ca](#).

Choose higher fibre foods more often

Foods higher in fibre help manage your blood sugar and help prevent constipation. Higher fibre foods include:

- beans, split peas, and lentils
- fruits
- nuts and seeds
- vegetables
- whole grains

Eat foods higher in protein at each meal and evening snack

Protein is important for you and your baby’s health. Foods higher in protein include:

- beans, split peas, and lentils
- cheese
- cottage cheese
- eggs
- fish
- Greek and Icelandic yogurt
- meat
- poultry
- tofu, soy, and edamame

Get enough calcium from the foods and drinks you have every day

If you don’t drink at least 2 cups (500 mL) of milk or fortified soy beverage a day, or eat other foods with calcium, talk to your dietitian about how to make sure you get enough. For more information go to [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](#) and search “[Dairy Foods for Pregnancy](#)”.

Sugar substitutes

You can use sugar substitutes and foods with sugar substitutes in small amounts. For more information speak to a dietitian or search “[sugar and sweeteners](#)” at [diabetes.ca](#).

Sugar substitutes don’t raise your blood sugar. Read labels to find out what kind of sugar substitutes are in the foods you buy.

Sugar substitutes you can use in pregnancy

Sugar substitute	Brand name example
acesulfame potassium (Ace-K)	Added to packaged foods and beverages
aspartame	Nutrasweet® Equal® store brands
monk fruit	Splenda® Lakanto® often combined with stevia or a sugar alcohol like erythritol
saccharin	Hermesetas®
stevia	Sugar Twin® Stevia, Truvia® Pure Via® store brands
sucralose	Splenda® Sugar Twin® Sucralose store brands

Sugar substitutes not recommended to use in pregnancy

cyclamate	Sucaryl® Sugar Twin® Sweet N’ Low® Weight Watchers® store brands
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Take a daily multivitamin and mineral supplement

Look for these amounts of vitamins and minerals when choosing a multivitamin:

Iron between 16–27 mg

Vitamin D at least 400 IU (10 mcg)

Folic acid needs are higher if you have diabetes:

For type 1 and type 2 diabetes:	Folic acid every day:
At least 3 months before pregnancy and for the first 3 months of pregnancy	1.0 mg (1000 mcg) in your multivitamin
For the last 6 months of pregnancy and as long as you breastfeed	0.4–1.0 mg (400–1000 mcg) in your multivitamin

Folic acid supplements help prevent problems while your baby's spine and nervous system are forming (neural tube defects).

Ask your healthcare team about the supplement that's right for you.

Gain a healthy amount of weight

Weight gain is an important part of pregnancy. The best weight gain for you depends on your weight before pregnancy. Your healthcare team can help you decide on a healthy weight gain for you. To find out more, search "healthy weight gain" at www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca.

Be active

Being active can help manage your blood sugar and weight gain. It may improve your sleep and mood, give you more energy, and prepare your body for childbirth. If you take insulin, ask your healthcare team about changing your food or insulin dose for activity.

Talk to your healthcare team about the type and amount of activity that's right for you.

Breastfeeding

For those that are able, breastfeeding has many benefits for you and your baby. One benefit is that it may help reduce your baby's risk of developing diabetes later in life.

While breastfeeding you may have lower blood sugars. If you are on insulin, there are ways to prevent blood sugars from going too low such as:

- eat a snack that contains carbohydrate while you breastfeed
- talk to your healthcare team about any changes in your insulin you might need to make

After pregnancy, visit your doctor and healthcare team to talk about the changes you may need to manage your diabetes.

You can learn more about breastfeeding and other topics at healthyparentshealthychildren.ca, search any of the items below:

- calcium and vitamin D
- iron
- omega-3 fats
- food safety
- common problems in pregnancy: heartburn, nausea, vomiting, and constipation

For More Support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit [Nutrition for Pregnancy & Lactation](http://www.ahs.ca/nutrition/Page18358.aspx) (www.ahs.ca/nutrition/Page18358.aspx)
- Call, text or chat with 211 Alberta (<https://ab.211.ca/>). It is a provincial directory of financial benefits, programs, and services.
- Search diabetes.ca for info on "[glycemic index](#)" and "[sugar and sweeteners](#)".