Diabetes and Pregnancy/Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes is diabetes that a woman can develop during pregnancy.

When you have diabetes, your body cannot use the sugars and starches (carbohydrates) it takes in as food to make energy. As a result, your body collects extra sugar in your blood. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we don’t know all the causes of gestational diabetes. Some, but not all, women with gestational diabetes are overweight before getting pregnant or have diabetes in the family. From 1 in 50 to 1 in 20 pregnant women has gestational diabetes, as it is more common in certain ethnic populations than others.

CDC lists certain facts about gestational diabetes that every woman should know. First, gestational diabetes that is not controlled can cause your baby to:

1. Grow very large (weigh more than 9 pounds), which in turn can lead to problems with the delivery of your baby. A large baby born through the birth canal can injure nerves in the shoulder; break a collarbone; or, rarely, have brain damage from lack of oxygen.

2. Have quickly changing blood sugar after delivery. Your baby’s doctor will watch for low blood sugar after birth and treat it if needed.

3. Be more likely to become overweight or obese during childhood or adolescence. Obesity can lead to Type 2 Diabetes.

In addition, gestational diabetes that is not controlled can cause you to:

1. Have problems during delivery.

2. Have a very large baby and need to have a cesarean section (C-section)
3. Take longer to recover from childbirth if your baby is delivered by C-section. Gestational diabetes goes away after pregnancy, but sometimes diabetes stays. It’s important to be checked for diabetes after your baby is born. About half of all women who have gestational diabetes get Type 2 Diabetes later in life.

For further information regarding this article, please see CDC’s “Diabetes and Pregnancy: Gestational Diabetes” (order #21-1095). Or view this information at www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/bd/diabetespregnancy.htm You may also contact Karen Kuehn Howell, Ph.D., at the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 1256 Briarcliff Road, N.E., 309W, Atlanta, Georgia, 30306. You can also phone us at 404-712-9829 or visit our website at http://www.emory.edu/MSACD.

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