



Healthy Eating with Gestational Diabetes

Patient Name: _____

Your Dietitian: _____

What is Gestational Diabetes?

Gestational diabetes is a form of diabetes which can occur during pregnancy. This means that the body can't break down glucose (sugar) properly from within the blood stream, causing blood glucose levels *or blood sugar levels* to rise which can be very dangerous.

Once diagnosed, diabetes can be treated through dietary changes, medication, or a combination of both. It can be monitored through checking your blood after mealtimes, which your nurse will have hopefully already discussed with you.

In this booklet we will go through healthy eating advice for diabetes, and how aspects of diet can affect your blood levels. The aim is to teach you how to have good glucose control, allowing you and your baby to remain happy and healthy for the remainder of your pregnancy.

What foods will effect my blood glucose levels?

Blood glucose levels are affected by Carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are a food group which are made up of sugars, which the body breaks down into glucose – the body's main source of energy. Sugars are broken down by a hormone called insulin. Women suffering from gestational diabetes become resistant to insulin which makes it difficult to break down these sugars, causing levels in the blood to become high.

How do high blood glucose levels effect my baby?

When a woman's blood glucose is high during pregnancy, it is passed to the baby as they share a blood supply. This causes the baby to produce higher levels of insulin to break down these sugars. The increased levels of insulin cause the baby to have more rapid growth which can make delivery more difficult due to higher birth weights.

What is a 'normal' blood glucose level?

For a person without diabetes, we would expect a blood glucose level of around 3.5-7.8 mmol/L maintained by the body at all times, as they are able to produce adequate insulin to keep the blood glucose levels stable.

For a person with diabetes, it takes certain measures, which includes dietary changes and/ or medication to keep these stable and therefore we have some target levels to try and keep your blood levels within.

Can I exercise during pregnancy?

Exercise is safe and encouraged during pregnancy. For those with gestational diabetes it can be a useful tool to help control blood glucose levels as exercise will lower these levels naturally. It does not need to be strenuous exercise, just a walk following meals or a light workout. Aim for around 30 minutes per day.

Should I be gaining weight during pregnancy?

If you are a healthy weight and an average height, you should expect to gain around 25-35lb (10-15kg) during your pregnancy. If you are overweight, it is wise to try to limit your weight gain during pregnancy to 15-25lbs (5-10kg), or even less.

What is a Carbohydrate?

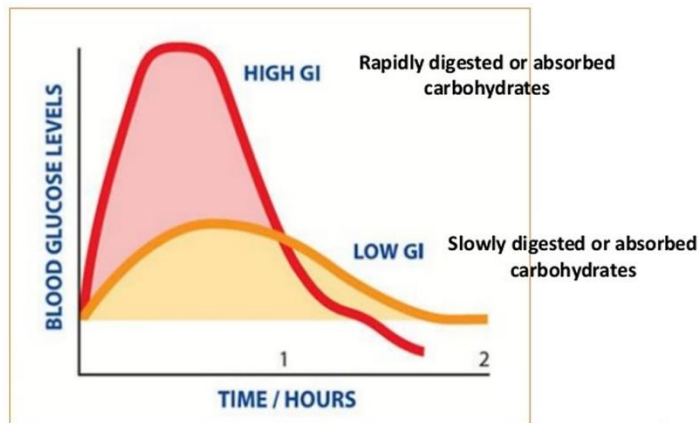
Carbohydrate is a food group consisting of starches and sugars which are broken down by the body as a form of energy. It is important that you consume carbohydrate to ensure you have energy to do daily activities as well as for your baby to grow healthily in pregnancy.

Common food and drinks in this group include:

- Starchy foods; bread, rice, pasta and potatoes and potato products.
- Sugary foods; honey, jam, syrup, sweets.
- Fruit and fruit juice.
- Milk and yogurts.

Although all containing carbohydrates, the body will break down all these foods at different rates which will have differing effects on blood sugar levels. This is dependent on the foods **Glycaemic Index (GI)**.

What is Glycemic Index (GI)



Opting for foods that have a lower glycaemic index will ultimately help your blood glucose levels stay in control.

Too many high GI foods will cause a rapid increase in blood glucose levels which can lead to medication being needed to help bring these down.

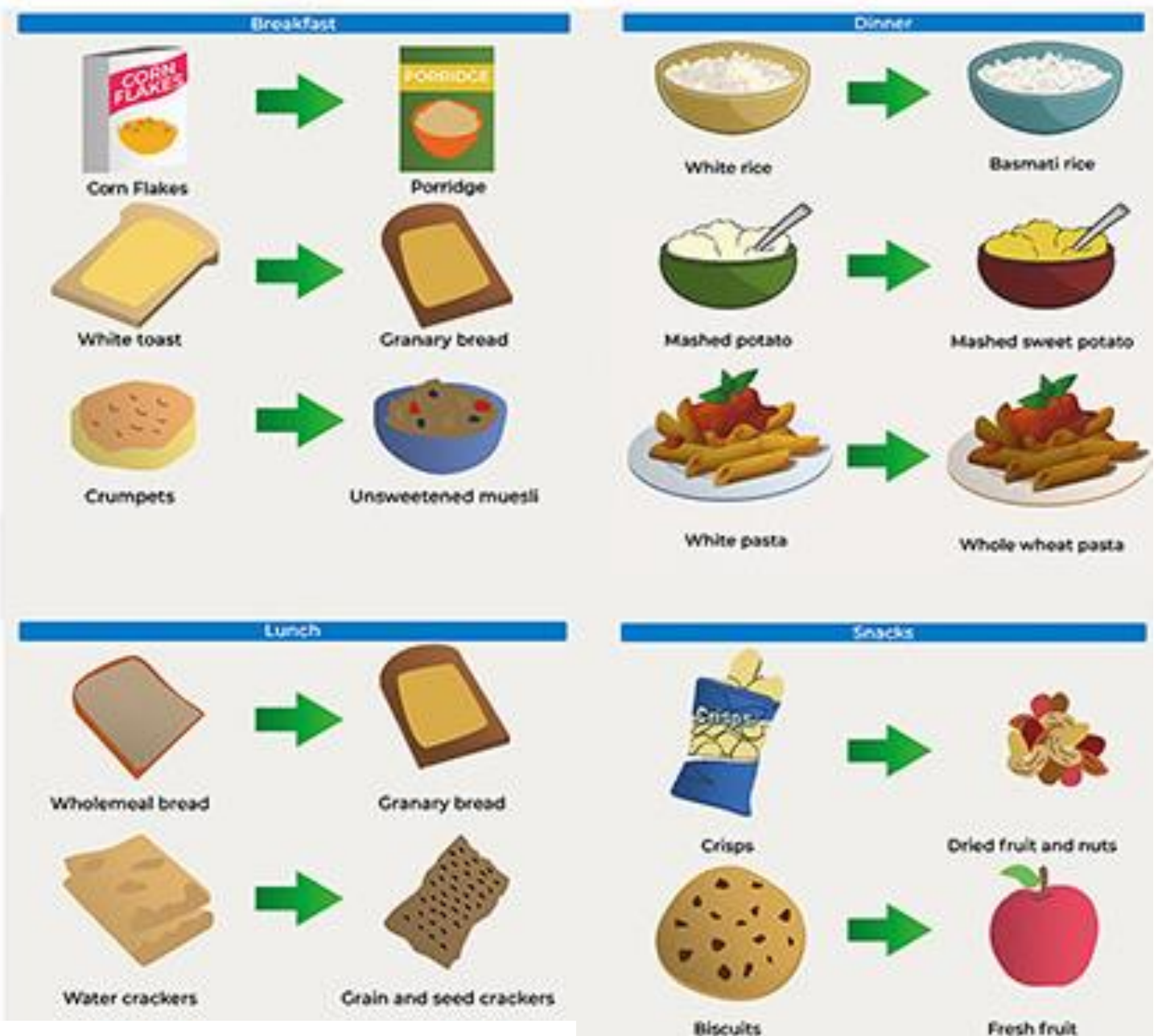
High GI food & drink

- White Bread/ white bread products such as crumpets, muffins, baguettes, crackers.
- Crisps and chips/fries.
- White rice
- Fufu/Gari/Yam
- Chapatti/Roti
- Sugary Cereal – usually children's/ family cereals (coco pops, rice crispies, cornflakes, frosted flakes)
- Fruit juices and full sugar fizzy drinks.
- Dried fruit
- Tropical fruits (pineapple, mango, watermelon)

Low GI food & drink

- Wholemeal bread and bread products as well as granary breads.
- Wholemeal or basmati rice
- White or brown pasta.
- Oats
- Fibrous Cereals – still have with caution
- “diet” fizzy drinks, no added sugar cordials.
- Chapati made with Medium flour.
- Vegetables

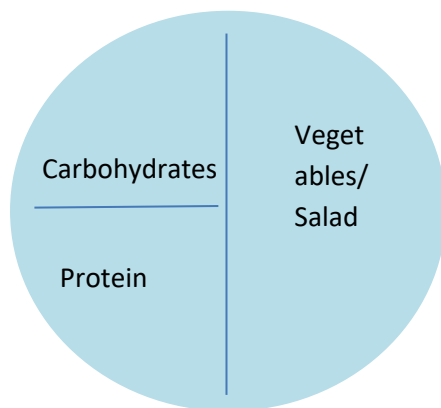
Examples of high to low GI swaps



Swapping high GI foods to low GI foods within the diet can help you prevent large spikes in blood glucose levels.

Other important aspects are portion control and timings of meals and snacks. The next few pages will explain this in more detail.

Healthy Portions



Ideally, when diagnosed with gestational diabetes you should be limiting the amount of carbohydrate you are eating in order to help maintain good blood glucose control.

The image to the left shows how you should be building your plate : 1 portion of carbohydrate (such as potatoes, rice, pasta, chapatti, bread, yam, Fufu/Gari), 1 portion of protein(meat, fish, eggs, cheese and plant-based alternatives) and the rest made up with vegetables or salad for bulk and fiber.

Below shows some examples of a healthy portion of carbohydrates with a meal .

Food pairing

Eating protein with each meal will help slow down the digestion of the carbohydrate you eat, this can be helpful in lessening a spike in your blood glucose readings and overall control.

- Easy methods of this are as follows:
- Toast with cheese, egg or peanut butter
- Pasta with a creamy sauce and meat/ meat alternative

Snacks ideas

Crispbread with egg
Peanut butter on a rice cake
Vegetable sticks and hummus
Glass of semi skimmed milk
Nuts or seeds.
Pot of no added sugar yoghurt / plain Greek yogurt
Cottage cheese/ cream cheese on a crisp bread
Boiled ham
Boiled egg
Celery with cottage cheese
Oat cake with cheese
Low fat cheese triangle
Crab sticks or meat snacks
Feta cheese with olives
roast chicken

If you are feeling hungry in between your meals, it is better to opt for lower carbohydrate snacks to ensure your blood glucose is not already high prior to your mealtimes. Above are some snack ideas that are better to opt for if feeling hungry.

If opting for a convenience snack or food, please try and be mindful of the carbohydrate contents of these snacks. Full nutritional information can be found on food labels, please disregard the "of which sugars" section as all carbohydrate will become sugar once digested. Please try and opt for snack foods that are around 10g - 15g of carbohydrates. This may include: "lighter crisps" such as wotsits, pombear, quavers and skips, 2 finger kit kat biscuits, dairylea dunker pots, small bags of crackers such as ritz minis or mini cheddars.

If having any problems understanding the information within this booklet, or experiencing high or low blood glucose levels throughout the week, please contact a member of the team on the below details:

Specialist Diabetes Midwives Lavinia Hall/Erica Birch 07768554897/ 01922 656577

Specialist Diabetes Nursing Team 01922 656543

Diabetes Dietitians 01922 605 705/ 01922 270535

If unable to reach a member of the team, please leave a voicemail message with your name and contact details, and someone will get back to you ASAP.