



## Screening for Gestational Diabetes

### **What is Gestational Diabetes?**

Pregnant women who have never had diabetes before but who have high blood sugar (glucose) levels during pregnancy are said to have gestational diabetes. This condition affects about 4% of all pregnant women.

Gestational diabetes starts when your body is unable to make and use all the insulin it needs for pregnancy. Insulin is the enzyme that breaks down sugar in your blood. In normal pregnancy, hormones produced by the placenta make women slightly resistant to their own insulin. This slows the breakdown of glucose, making more glucose available to the baby for growth. Usually women produce enough insulin to keep blood sugar levels normal but if this process is out of balance blood sugar levels stay high and the baby gets extra sugar.

### **How could it affect me or my baby?**

There are a few ways that having gestational diabetes in pregnancy could affect you and your baby. One concern is that you may grow a baby that weighs more than 4000grams or 8lbs 13 oz – which can lead to higher rates of the shoulders being difficult to deliver at birth, cesarean section, and injury to you or your baby at time of delivery. Babies of this size sometimes have low blood sugar, low calcium levels, and higher rates of jaundice. However, most babies who are this size are born without complications and to women who do not have gestational diabetes. In addition, women who have gestational diabetes are at increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes later in life. Having this screen done can therefore encourage you to be mindful of your diet and exercise habits to help decrease your chance of this complication later in life.

### **Who is at higher risk?**

You may have an increased risk for developing gestational diabetes in this pregnancy if one or more of the following applies to you :

- over the age of 40
- gestational diabetes in a previous pregnancy
- a first degree relative (i.e. mother, father, sister or brother) with type 2 diabetes
- a previous baby that was over 4000g
- a large amount of amniotic fluid in a previous pregnancy (polyhydramnios)
- measure large for dates
- repeatedly spill glucose on urine stick
- are non-Caucasian
- a Body Mass Index >27 (obesity)
- an unexplained stillbirth

### **How will I know if I have it?**

At 24-28 weeks you will be offered a Glucose Challenge Test, which involves going to the lab for a blood test. They will give you a sweet drink (glucose) and test your blood after one hour. If your blood sugar level is on the higher end, it will be recommended that you take the Glucose Tolerance Test.

For this test you don't eat or drink anything but water from midnight on, then go to the lab the next morning and this time you have a sweeter drink and have your blood sugar levels tested 1 and 2 hours later. This test can diagnose gestational diabetes, but is not 100% accurate. It will sometimes indicate that you have gestational diabetes when you don't, or vice versa.

### **What happens if the test says I have it?**

There is no real "cure" for gestational diabetes. You will be referred to a dietician to help you plan a low-sugar diet with complex carbohydrates that will help you manage your blood sugar levels. Very few women would need to be treated with insulin for gestational diabetes and it usually goes away on its own after pregnancy.

**What does the research say?**

There is not good enough research at this point in time to say that screening every woman for gestational diabetes is recommended. While many care providers routinely test all women in pregnancy, the Stratford Midwives offer the screening to all women, and each woman can decide for herself whether she feels it would be beneficial. Research has not shown that the diagnosis and treatment of gestational diabetes reduce the risks or prevent complications for you or your baby. A diagnosis of gestational diabetes can cause women unnecessary stress and women are more likely to have unnecessary interventions if they are labeled with this condition.