

What is gestational diabetes?

During pregnancy, some mothers develop diabetes (high blood sugar). This type of diabetes is called **gestational diabetes**.

What causes gestational diabetes?

Pregnancy causes many changes in the body. In some women, these changes make it hard for the body to produce enough **insulin** to use all the sugar ingested.

Insulin helps control blood sugar. Without enough insulin, blood sugar levels go up (**hyperglycemia**). When the levels get too high, the woman has diabetes.

How can gestational diabetes affect my baby?

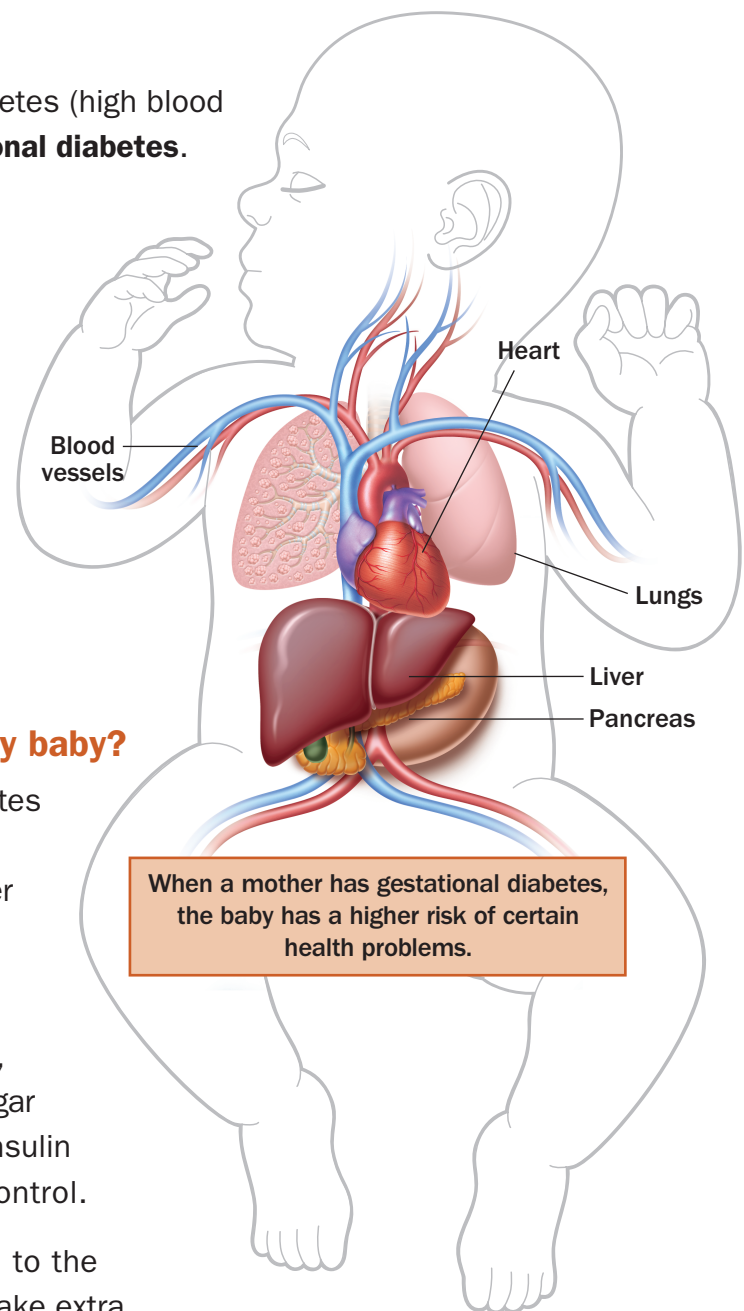
Babies born to mothers with gestational diabetes are often premature and/or large for their gestational age. These babies are also at higher risk for certain health problems.

Low blood sugar

When the mother has gestational diabetes, the unborn baby is exposed to high blood sugar levels. As a result, the baby makes extra insulin to keep his/her own blood sugar under control.

After birth, the baby is no longer exposed to the mother's blood. If the baby continues to make extra insulin, it may push his/her blood sugar levels too low (**hypoglycemia**).

Very low blood sugar can cause seizures, which can result in long-term delays in development. Feeding the baby will often return blood sugar levels to normal. If needed, the healthcare team can also give the baby a sugar (**glucose**) solution through a vein.



Understanding Gestational Diabetes (continued)

How can gestational diabetes affect my baby? (continued)

Type 2 Diabetes

When the mother has gestational diabetes, the baby has a higher risk of being obese and developing type 2 diabetes later in life. You can lower that risk by helping your child make healthy choices while growing up. These choices include eating right, being physically active, and maintaining a healthy weight.

Jaundice

Babies with a yellowish color to their skin and the whites of their eyes are said to have jaundice. In most cases, jaundice is short-term and causes no lasting problems.

Respiratory Distress Syndrome

Babies with respiratory distress syndrome (RDS) have to work hard to breathe. They may need help to get enough oxygen.

Other Health Problems

Gestational diabetes can affect any organ. A few babies may have heart or other problems. Your health care team will keep you up-to-date on your baby's health.

What will happen next?

Most babies will respond well to the correct treatment. But every baby is different. The health care team will talk with you about what is best for your baby.

Glossary

Diabetes – disease in which blood sugar levels are too high

Gestational – during pregnancy

Glucose – a type of sugar the body uses for energy

Hyperglycemia – too much sugar in the blood

Hypoglycemia – too little sugar in the blood

Insulin – hormone that helps control blood sugar levels

Ask the health care team when you have questions—they are there to help.

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