

GLOSSARY

Preconception- This refers to the time period before you become pregnant.

Conception- This means when you become pregnant.

HbA1c- This is a blood test and the preferred way for your doctor or nurse to assess control of your diabetes. It is measured in mmol/mol. It is a measure of blood glucose control over the last 2 to 3 months.

Congenital Heart Defects- Congenital heart disease is a general term for a range of birth defects that affect the normal workings of the heart. The term "congenital" means the condition is present at birth. Congenital heart disease is one of the most common types of birth defect, affecting up to 9 in every 1,000 babies born in the UK.

Useful resources

1. **DIABETES UK**
<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/diabetes-the-basics/gestational-diabetes>
2. **NHS CHOICES**
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/diabetes-pregnant/#video-gestational-diabetes>

References:

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Diabetes in pregnancy : management from preconception to the postnatal period. NICE guideline (NG3). NICE. London; 2015 Feb.

Summary and Recommendations of the International Workshop Conference on Gestational Diabetes. B Metzger, T A Buchanan, D R Coustan et al, DIABETES CARE, Vol. 30, Supplement 2, July 2007

PLANNING A PREGNANCY IF YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY HAD GESTATIONAL DIABETES



If you have had gestational diabetes in your previous pregnancy and are planning another pregnancy, effective preconception care will improve the likelihood of you having a healthy baby.

Have you had your HbA1c tested before planning a pregnancy?

In the vast majority of women diagnosed with gestational diabetes, the diabetes will go away after delivery of the baby. However, our data shows that 10-15% of women continue to have either pre-diabetes or type 2 diabetes after pregnancy. Your doctor would have advised you to have a test for diabetes 6 weeks after the birth of your baby to make sure that your blood glucose levels have returned to normal.

Up to 60% of women with gestational diabetes will go on to develop type 2 diabetes 5-10 years after their pregnancy. Hence, it is important each year to test for diabetes by measuring HbA1c in the blood. A good lifestyle consisting of a healthy balanced diet, regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight will greatly reduce your chances of getting type 2 diabetes in the future.

It is vital to test your HbA1c if you are planning another pregnancy to be sure that you do not have type 2 diabetes.

What does your HbA1c result mean?

If the HbA1c result is below 42mmol/mol, you do not have diabetes and you can be reassured. However, you will still be required to monitor your blood glucose during pregnancy.

If your HbA1c is more than 42mmol/mol, your doctor will ask you to repeat the test in a few weeks. A result of 42- 48 confirms pre-diabetes and 48 or more indicates type 2 diabetes. For women planning a pregnancy who are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, the aim is to keep the HbA1c below 48 where this can be done safely. You may be asked to test your blood glucose levels regularly by pricking your finger and using a glucose meter at home and may need to start medications for diabetes. Your nurse or GP should refer you to the diabetes preconception team who will be able to provide specialist support to help you. Any reduction in the HbA1c level will reduce the risks to your baby.

If the HbA1c is more than 64mmol/mol, around the time of conception and in the first few weeks of pregnancy, it may affect your baby's development or increase the risk of miscarriage. The risks of congenital heart defects in the baby are also increased.

When do you start Folic Acid supplement?

If type 2 diabetes has been confirmed, you are advised to start 5mg of folic acid as soon as you are trying to become pregnant and for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. This helps to prevent neural tube defects (NTD), such as Spina Bifida. Folic acid 5mg tablets are only available on prescription so you will need to obtain a prescription from your GP practice prior to trying to become pregnant.

For patients who have not been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes an over the counter dose of folic acid 400mcg tablets is sufficient but should also be taken as soon as you are trying to become pregnant and for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

What happens to other medications?

Some medications given for high blood pressure or high cholesterol are not suitable for use in pregnancy as they can affect the baby's growth and development. It is very important that all your medications are reviewed when you are planning a pregnancy as safer alternatives may have to be initiated when you are trying to become pregnant.

What about weight management?

It is important to start pregnancy with a healthy weight as it increases your chances of having a healthy pregnancy. This will also improve your blood glucose and blood pressure control. The preconception team will help you with specialist advice.

How about smoking and drinking alcohol?

You are strongly advised not to smoke cigarettes or vape if you are planning to become pregnant as it may harm your baby. Local pharmacies can provide smoking cessation advice and support. Alternatively, you can call the Pan London Stop Smoking Helpline 0300 123 1044. The safest approach is to avoid alcohol completely if you are planning a pregnancy as the more alcohol you drink, the greater the risk.

How do you get referred to the diabetes preconception team?

If type 2 diabetes has been confirmed, ask your GP or Practice Nurse to refer you to the specialist diabetes preconception team to support you with planning your pregnancy.

Once I am pregnant, when do I start monitoring my blood glucose?

Once you are pregnant, you will be advised by your antenatal diabetes team to start monitoring your blood glucose from early pregnancy. This will usually occur at your booking in appointment and the equipment needed to carry out these tests will be provided for you.