What You Need to Know About Gestational Diabetes

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What Is Gestational Diabetes?

While gestational diabetes (GDM) is a temporary form of diabetes that develops during pregnancy, there is a risk of it turning into type 2 diabetes later on in life. After being diagnosed with GDM as many as 30 percent or women will develop diabetes within 15 years and the risk is even higher (around 50%) if the woman is obese.

Therefore, if you have been diagnosed with GDM, it is important to consider the following steps.

Regular Screening

Get regular screening after GDM – the earlier you receive the diagnosis, the better it can be treated. If you develop type 2 diabetes and it is not managed, you may have problems with future pregnancies, as there is an increased risk for miscarriages, stillbirth, or malformations of the fetus.

You are also more likely to develop heart problems or complications affecting the eyes, kidneys or nerves. As soon as you deliver the baby, plan for follow up appointments with your doctor. There is a glucose tolerance test recommended six weeks to six months after your baby is born, as well other screening tests recommended before planning another pregnancy.

Glucose Tolerance Test

The glucose tolerance test will help evaluate your condition. You need to fast for eight hours before the test. The technician will take a blood sample and then you will receive a sugary drink. After two hours, you will have another blood test. Based on the blood tests, you will receive the diagnosis: you may have normal values, an increased risk of diabetes, prediabetes or type 2 diabetes. A diagnosis of diabetes is usually based on two abnormal blood tests done on two different days.

Diet and Exercise

Work closely with your dietician. Your diet is essential for both prevention and management of diabetes. One study that involved over 40,000 participants found that western diet (high in red meat, processed meats, high fat diary, and sugar) had almost double the risk of developing diabetes compared with those who ate a healthy diet.

Regular exercise should also be part of your healthy lifestyle. For every 500 calories burned during exercise weekly, you cut down the relative risk of developing diabetes by 6%. After you exercise, you help your body to use insulin better for up to 70 hours. Therefore, you should work out at least 3-4 times a week.

Studies also found that the progression of diabetes is slowed down when you exercise. The glucose tolerance also improves dramatically when you work out regularly and eat healthy.

Cut Out Smoking, Stress

Don’t smoke. Smoking reduces your body’s ability to properly use insulin and also makes you more likely to develop the “apple shape” body (which is considered a risk for diabetes). One study found that those who smoke are three times more likely to develop diabetes compared with non-smokers.

Avoid stress. Try deep breathing, yoga, meditation or see a psychotherapist if needed. A 2005 review of several studies reveal that stress may play a role in the onset of diabetes and has a negative impact on the glycemic control, while managing the stress with various techniques helps improve the quality of life and the glucose levels.