

Guide for a healthy lifestyle after gestational diabetes

Congratulations! Now that you have your newborn in your arms, here are some tips to keep you and your family in good health.

Healthy weight

A healthy weight will lower your diabetes and heart disease risk. Breastfeeding, eating well, and keeping physically active will help you get back to a healthy weight. Aim for a weight loss of 1 – 2 lb/week. It may take 8 – 12 months to get back to your pre-pregnancy weight.

The healthy BMI range is 18.5 – 24.9 kg/m². Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of your weight in relation to your height. Determine your BMI at www.diabetes.ca/bmi.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the best way to feed your baby. For optimal growth and development, it is recommended that the only food and drink babies take for the first 6 months is breast milk and that breastfed babies take a vitamin D supplement of 400 IU daily for the first year. Breastfed babies have less illness and, when breastfed infants become adults, they have a lower risk of developing obesity, diabetes and certain other ailments.

Breast milk is the best fast food – it takes no time to prepare, is always at the right temperature and no sterilizing is needed. Breastfeeding can also help you to lose weight since it takes a lot of calories to make breast milk. Safe artificial sweeteners while breastfeeding include small amounts of acesulfame potassium, aspartame and sucralose.

Breastfeeding is natural and it may take time and patience to learn. For more information on breastfeeding, contact your healthcare provider.



Sample meal plan for breastfeeding

Breakfast:

Whole grain cold cereal (½ cup, 125 mL)
1 Slice whole grain toast
1 Egg
Margarine (1 tsp, 5 mL)
Blueberries (½ cup, 125 mL)
Low-fat milk (1 cup, 250 mL)
Tea or coffee – no sugar

Morning snack:

Vegetables
Yogurt dip (2 Tbsp, 30 mL)

Lunch:

Minestrone soup (1 cup, 250 mL)
Wrap – 1 tortilla (10") wheat flour; chicken, baked (2 oz, 60 g); mayonnaise (light) (1 Tbsp, 15 mL); lettuce leaves; tomato slices
Celery sticks (½ cup, 125 mL)
Low-fat yogurt (¾ cup, 175 mL)
Tea or coffee – no sugar

Afternoon snack:

1 Medium apple
Low-fat cheese (1 oz, 30 g)

Dinner:

Brown rice, cooked (1 cup, 250 mL)
Vegetables
Green salad (1 cup, 250 mL)
Low-fat salad dressing
Baked salmon (2 oz, 60 g)
Applesauce, unsweetened (½ cup, 125 mL)
Low-fat milk (½ cup, 125 mL)

Evening snack:

Melba toast (4)
Peanut butter (1 Tbsp, 15 mL)
Low-fat milk (1 cup, 250 mL)

When you finish breastfeeding, you can reduce your snacks.

For more information, see the Canadian Diabetes Association's *Eating away from home* resource.

Healthy eating

Healthy eating is important not only before and during your pregnancy, but throughout your life. To meet both your own and your baby's nutritional needs, here are some tips from *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.

Meals and snacks

- Eat three meals a day at regular times. Space your meals 4 – 6 hours apart. Avoid skipping meals.
- Include a variety of foods from the four food groups.
- Fill half of your plate with vegetables.
- Include some protein in every meal. Protein sources include lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, peanut butter, nuts, tofu, lentils and low-fat cheese or milk.
- Choose healthy snacks such as vegetables and fruit.
- Every day, aim for:
 - 7 – 8 servings of vegetables and fruit;
 - 6 – 7 servings of grain products;
 - 2 servings of milk and alternatives; and
 - 2 servings of meat and alternatives.
- When breastfeeding, you need up to 2 – 3 extra servings each day.

Include fluids and fibre

- Satisfy your thirst with water instead of sugary drinks.
- Choose high-fibre foods such as whole wheat pasta, whole grain breads, bran cereals, brown rice, vegetables, fruits and legumes (such as beans, peas or lentils).

Remember to:

- Read labels. Look for foods that are higher in fibre and lower in fat and sodium. For more information, visit www.healthyeatingisinstore.ca.
- Limit foods and drinks high in calories, fat, sugar and salt (sodium). Limit cakes, candies, cookies, French fries, chips, soft drinks, sports drinks and sweetened drinks.

Physical activity

Being active helps to lower your chance of obesity and diabetes, and other health problems such as heart disease and osteoporosis.

Regular activity will improve your energy level and help you feel better overall. Regular activity will also help you to manage stress and will lower your chance of developing postpartum depression.



Before starting any exercise program, be sure to speak with your doctor.

Make activity a part of the family routine to help you and your child develop lifelong healthy habits:

- Choose activities you can do as a family such as swimming, walking, biking, dancing or simply playing outside.
- Set simple goals:
 - Start with a ten-minute walk after meals.
 - Gradually build up the intensity and duration of the activity you're doing. Your goal is to reach at least 30 minutes per day, most days of the week, of moderate intensity *activity* (meaning you raise your heart rate and break a sweat).
- Wear a pedometer and count your steps. Gradually step your way up to 10,000 steps per day.
- Limit inactive pastimes (e.g. watching TV, using a computer) to no more than an hour or two each day. Get up and stretch for a few minutes every hour.
- Try to include a variety of activities:
 - Build up your endurance by running, participating in a postnatal fitness class, biking or swimming.
 - Increase your flexibility by performing yoga, gardening or stretching.
 - Build up your strength by weightlifting, carrying groceries, doing push-ups or sit-ups.
- Find a partner, friend or another new mom to exercise with you.
- Remember to always drink water before, during and after your activity.

Glucose Tolerance Test (GTT)

After having gestational diabetes (GDM) you may still have elevated blood glucose ("blood sugar"). To determine this, you need to have a *glucose tolerance test* performed between six weeks and six months after you give birth.

Why do a GTT?

Having had GDM, you are at increased risk of developing diabetes or prediabetes. (Prediabetes is a condition in which your blood glucose is higher than normal but not as high as someone who has diabetes. Prediabetes – especially if untreated – often progresses to diabetes as time goes by.)

It is very important to diagnose and treat prediabetes and diabetes. Over the long term, undiagnosed diabetes can lead to heart attack, stroke and damage to eyes, kidneys and nerves. Undiagnosed diabetes in pregnancy increases the health risks for your baby.



My healthy lifestyle goals

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

A dietitian can help you with healthy eating and other lifestyle goals.



Planning for a future pregnancy?

There are a few things to consider before becoming pregnant:

- **Be tested for diabetes.** Speak to your doctor *well* before you start trying to get pregnant.
- **If your GTT was abnormal after delivery,** work with your healthcare team to make sure your blood glucose levels are normal before you try to get pregnant again. High blood glucose levels early in pregnancy increase the health risks for your developing baby.
- **Healthy eating** before pregnancy will ensure you have good nutrition and will help you reach a healthy weight. Follow *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.
- **Folic acid.** Take a daily multivitamin with folic acid at least three months prior to becoming pregnant and continue it during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Some women need higher amounts of folic acid. Ask your healthcare team what is recommended for you.
- **An active lifestyle** is important to improve your health. Follow Canada's *Physical Activity Guide*.
- **A healthy weight** before pregnancy helps reduce risks during pregnancy.

Take time to care for yourself – you are worth it!

Remember that after your baby is born, your body will experience many changes. It is important to eat well, stay active and get enough rest and sleep.

Speak with your healthcare team about your risk factors for developing type 2 diabetes and how you can make changes to lower your risk. Choosing a healthy lifestyle is part of being a role model for your children.

For Health Canada's healthy living resources, including *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* and *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Living*, visit their website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca.

Across the country, the Canadian Diabetes Association is leading the fight against diabetes by helping people with diabetes live healthy lives while we work to find a cure. We are supported in our efforts by a community-based network of volunteers, members, employees, healthcare professionals, researchers and partners. By providing education and services, advocating on behalf of people with diabetes, supporting research and translating research into practical applications – we are delivering on our mission.