

Women's Health & Diabetes

Information, advice & support for Women with diabetes who do not intend pregnancy and those planning pregnancy

Aintree University Hospital 

NHS Foundation Trust

Where quality matters

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Contraception and Diabetes

Women with diabetes are just as fertile as others, so if now is not the right time for you to have a baby and you have a steady or casual sexual relationship, it is really important that you have effective contraception.

There is a lot of choice of contraceptive methods. All of them are safe for someone with diabetes and you should choose the one which suits you best. You can discuss with your GP, family planning clinic or your diabetes care team.

In general the most effective methods should be used such as the combined oral contraceptive pill, the coil or Depot injection. Condoms are effective if used carefully and have the added advantage of protecting against sexually transmitted disease. You may prefer to use one of the more effective methods and use condoms as well if you have casual relationships. The progesterone only pill is safe for someone with diabetes, but unless it is taken every day at the same time it may not prevent a pregnancy. Many women have become pregnant because they forgot to take one tablet or had a tummy upset.

Preconception Planning

If you have diabetes and are thinking of having a baby it is never too soon to start planning for this. Having a baby is one of the most important decisions you will ever have to make.

Pregnant women with diabetes are at higher risk of problems for themselves and

their babies. Risks include miscarriage, giving birth to a large baby, having labour induced or requiring a caesarean section. Moreover the baby may be at risk of poor development, being stillborn or dying shortly after birth. But with expert care and attention to the things mentioned in this leaflet, most women will have a healthy baby.

- **Good control of your blood glucose**

You can improve your chances of giving birth to a healthy baby by keeping your blood glucose well controlled before you become pregnant and throughout your pregnancy. The most important phase of the baby's development is during the first 6 weeks after you conceive. In the first 2 or 3 weeks of this time you may not be aware of your pregnancy. Poor glucose control at this time increases the risk of your baby having a serious developmental problem affecting for example the heart, skeleton or spinal cord.

- **Folic acid tablets**

You should take folic acid 5mg daily while you are trying to get pregnant and for the first 12 weeks of your pregnancy. This vitamin reduces the risk of your baby having spina bifida (a spinal cord abnormality) and may protect against other conditions. You will need a prescription for this dose of folic acid from your doctor.

- **Eye screening**

Eye disease may get worse very quickly during your pregnancy. If you already

have eye disease, it is important that any course of laser treatment is completed before you become pregnant. It is important to have your eyes checked more often when you are pregnant so that changes may be detected and treated early.

- **Kidney tests**

People with diabetes are at higher risk of having kidney problems (called diabetic nephropathy). You should have a urine sample tested for leakage of protein and a blood sample to check for the substances filtered by the kidneys, before you stop using contraception.

- **Other medications**

If you are taking tablets for your diabetes you may have to stop taking them and start using insulin instead. However you may be able to take metformin tablets instead of, or as well as, insulin injections. Some medicines which you may be taking for your blood pressure or for your cholesterol (like statins) are not safe to use in pregnancy. These should be stopped or changed to safer tablets before you become pregnant. If you are switched to insulin injections to control your blood sugars, you can usually return to your tablets after pregnancy.

- **Diet**

Follow the advice about healthy eating from your dietitian.

- **Alcohol**

It is best not to have any alcohol during pregnancy. At least cut down the amount you drink. Alcohol may harm your baby and it may be more difficult to keep your blood glucose under tight control without having 'hypos'.

- **Smoking**

Smoking has many harmful effects on the body. Smoking during pregnancy

can damage your baby's health with long lasting or even permanent damage. Hence you need to stop smoking altogether and you can seek support for smoking cessation if needed.

Further Information

There is much more for you to know about pregnancy and diabetes. If you would like to know more, speak to your doctor or nurse.

You may ask to see The Diabetes Consultant for maternity or the Diabetes Specialist Nurse for maternity who have had lots of experience in looking after pregnant women with diabetes.

The organisations below can provide more information and support for women with diabetes who are planning to become pregnant, and women who are pregnant who already have diabetes or develop it during pregnancy.

Diabetes UK, 0845 120 2960 (careline)

<http://www.diabetes.org>

NICE Guidance

<http://www.guidance.nice.org.uk/CG63>

Contacts

Diabetes Consultant for Maternity
Telephone: 0151 529 3344

Diabetes Specialist Nurse
Telephone: 0151 529 3012

Diabetes Specialist Midwife
Telephone: 0151 529 3420

Obstetric Consultant for Diabetes & Pregnancy
Telephone: 0151 702 4271

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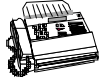
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