

Diabetes: preconception and antenatal advice

Our aim is that you have a positive experience while attending the Princess Anne Hospital for your diabetes care. We would like you to be involved at every stage in decisions about your care. This is to promote a healthy pregnancy, easier birth and healthy baby. Good control of diabetes is important to help reduce complications.

Before conception

Before you get pregnant, we recommend you take 5mgs of folic acid every day. Your doctor or the diabetes team will give you a prescription for this, because it is extra strength and cannot be bought 'over the counter.'

You will be offered appointments in the Princess Anne outpatients clinic every four to six weeks to have your diabetes control reviewed by the diabetes team. Between these visits, you will be able to call the diabetes midwife to help with insulin adjustment if you need support to improve your diabetes control.

We will ask you to have an **HbA_{1c}** result available at each clinic appointment. This is a blood test that gives an average of your blood sugar reading over the last few weeks. The blood request form will be given to you in clinic or you can get one from your doctor. The ideal result is between 6% (42 mmol/mol) and 6.5% (48 mmol/mol) before conception.

Good control of your diabetes before and during your pregnancy will reduce the risk of complications for you and your baby. This will be discussed with you at your clinic appointments.

At your appointment you will see:

- Professor Holt's diabetes team
- Penny Clarke, diabetes specialist midwife
- A dietician
- Mr Coleman's obstetric team (when pregnant)

When you become pregnant

As soon as you think you are pregnant, it is important that you let your GP and the diabetes team know as soon as possible (telephone: 07775 715930). If you are not sure, we can do a pregnancy test in the clinic. When you are about eight to nine weeks pregnant, you will be offered a scan to date your pregnancy. This dating scan will tell us approximately when your baby is due to be born. Mr. Coleman's obstetric team will review your scan with you at about nine to ten weeks gestation and discuss pregnancy management.

Your midwife

Your community midwife should see you at regular intervals outside of your hospital appointment times. These times are listed on the Framework for Antenatal Care sheet. You can also contact the diabetes midwife for advice, on 07775 715 930.

Pregnancy care pathway

Your visits will vary between weekly and monthly.

You will be offered an anomaly scan at 19 to 20 weeks of your pregnancy to show whether baby is developing normally.

Other scans will be offered to you at 28, 32, and 36 weeks, to monitor the health and growth pattern of your baby.

You will get to know your baby well and from 24 weeks it should move every day. If you notice a change from the normal movements it is important that you contact your midwife, the Day Unit (023 8079 6303) or Labour Ward (023 8079 6002) for advice.

At or around 34 weeks the diabetes team will give you a blue management information sheet for your care during labour and in the postnatal period. This will be attached to your hand held notes to assist the labour ward staff during these times.

From 36 weeks gestation

The diabetes and obstetric team, or your midwife, will usually see you every week. The obstetric team will provide a date for induction of labour or elective caesarean section, if medically necessary. This is usually in your 39th week, in line with the Trust guideline on pregnancy complicated with diabetes. If you go into labour before this time then the agreed plan of management for your birth will remain the same.

Labour

Once you are in labour you may need a drip to maintain your blood sugar levels within a normal range. This is called an 'insulin infusion' or 'sliding scale'.

We recommend that you test your blood sugar every hour. This is to allow regular and accurate changes to your insulin doses. You may use your own finger-pricking device but we will need to use a hospital meter to test your blood sugar. This testing will continue until after your baby has been born and you are able to eat.

After this time, the drip will stop and you will need to administer your own insulin. We recommend that you test your blood sugars four times a day as blood sugars levels can change a lot after the birth.

For the safety of your baby, we recommend that you give birth on the labour ward. This is because you may need a drip or there may be other problems (which will be discussed with you at your appointments).

Your baby's needs following birth

Babies born to women with diabetes can have low blood sugars after they are born. Your baby may require extra milk to maintain their blood sugar levels. This may be in the form of additional breast feeds, expressed breast milk or artificial milk.

Your baby will need to feed within the first 30 to 60 minutes following birth and continue to feed at least every three hours for the first 24 hours, or more often if hungry. The ward staff will monitor their blood sugar by pricking their heel to obtain the sample. If their blood sugar remains normal (greater than 3.0 mmol/L on three consecutive occasions) the monitoring will stop and you can usually go home. This management aims to reduce the risks to your baby, as discussed by the diabetes midwife and team.

Frequently asked questions:

Do my high blood sugars matter?

Yes. High blood sugars increase the risk of miscarriage and abnormalities. High blood sugars can also cause your baby to put on extra weight, which may lead to problems for you and baby especially around the time of birth and in their first few days afterwards.

How often should I test my blood sugars during pregnancy?

Check your blood sugar levels at least four to five times every day. You should aim for less than 6.0 mmol/L fasting / before meals, less than 7.8 mmol/L one hour after meals and between 7 and 7.8 mmol/L before bed.

What can I do to improve my diabetes?

- Exercise helps you to control your blood sugar and a minimum of 30 minutes is recommended everyday. For example, increase your exercise levels by walking and using the stairs at every opportunity. You need to feel 'out of breath' when doing this.
- Eat a healthy diet as advised by the diabetes team.
- Avoid being overweight - by healthy eating and exercising you can maintain a healthy weight during your pregnancy.
- Do not smoke or allow people to smoke around you or your baby.

What is healthy eating?

During all pregnancies and especially if you have diabetes, it is recommended that you have a well balanced and healthy diet. You should also have a regular meal pattern of three meals a day, or smaller meals more often, depending on how you are managing to eat.

The following are recommended:

- Starchy food at each meal (e.g. pasta, bread, rice, potatoes, cereal)
- Choosing low fat foods (i.e lean cuts of meat, grilling rather than frying)
- Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day
- Cutting down on sugary foods, including biscuits, sweets, chocolate, cake and sugary drinks.

Do I need to eat more now that I am pregnant?

No, you don't need to "eat for two" when you're pregnant. Your body adapts to ensure that you and your baby get the best from everything that you eat.

If you are hungry in between meals, try and choose a low sugar, low fat snack, such as fruit, diet yoghurt, toast, cereal or crisp breads with low fat or high fibre topping

Will I put on a lot of weight?

Weight gain is different for everyone. Pregnancy is not a time to try and lose weight but neither is it the time to put on lots of weight. If your weight concerns you, please ask to speak to the dietitian at your appointment with the diabetes team.

Do I have to wash my hands before testing my blood sugars?

Yes, unclean hands can affect your results.

General advice for washing:

- Wash your hands/arms in warm soapy water.
- Rinse and dry thoroughly.
- Follow the manufacturer's guidelines for use of the meter provided (your diabetes specialist midwife or your diabetes specialist nurse will help you)
- Prick your finger on the side near the nail - not the tip or pad.
- Wait a few seconds after pricking before attempting to obtain blood.
- To ensure you obtain a sufficient sample of blood, hold your hand and arm downwards. Gently squeeze down from the wrist to the finger, towards the area you have pricked.
- After you have completed the test remember to record the result on the chart provided by the diabetes team.
- Each meter company has a helpline you can contact for assistance.
- If you are out for the day then take a moist cotton ball to wipe the area clean.

Where can I get help or advice?

- Diabetes specialist midwife, telephone:023 8079 5007 or 07775 715 930
- Day unit, Princess Anne Hospital, telephone023 8079 6303
- Delivery suite (labour ward), PAH, telephone 023 8079 6002
- Your doctor's surgery
- The diabetes specialist nursing service, Southampton General Hospital, telephone 023 8077 7222 ext. 3761. You can leave a message on the answer phone.

- Diabetes specialist nursing office, Royal South Hants Hospital, telephone 023 8025 989 or 023 8071 8843. You can leave a message on the answer phone.
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- Diabetes UK, a national charitable organisation for people with diabetes. It has a vast range of information, leaflets and booklets. Some are free, some for purchase. Diabetes UK can be contacted at 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA, telephone 020 7424 1000, fax 020 7424 1001 or www.diabetes.org.uk

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