How will diabetes affect my pregnancy?

Several changes may be needed during pregnancy to control your diabetes.

First Trimester

Insulin needs may drop during the first three months, called the first trimester, because the growing baby uses some of your blood glucose, also called blood sugar. You may also have morning sickness and eat less than usual. This can decrease your blood sugar level and insulin requirements. You must guard against low blood sugar, also called hypoglycemia or an insulin reaction, by following your meal plan closely. Do not skip meals or snacks because you feel nauseous. Morning sickness may be helped by eating. If you cannot eat larger meals, try to eat small frequent meals. Have a snack at bedtime and carry a snack with you during the day.

The signs of low blood sugar include:

- Nervousness
- Sweating
- Hunger
- Fast heart beat
- Drowsiness
- Weakness
- Headache

Each person will become familiar with her own signs of low blood sugar. Treat low blood sugar by eating carbohydrates, such as milk, crackers and fruit.

Second Trimester

About the fourth month when you start the second trimester, your insulin needs will increase. The placenta begins to make hormones that interfere with the work of insulin. You will likely need more insulin to overcome the effects of the placenta. Your doctor may order short and intermediate acting insulin to control your diabetes. Sometimes during pregnancy, a short stay in the hospital is needed to closely check your blood sugar and medicines to control your diabetes.

Third Trimester

During the last three months of your pregnancy, called the third trimester, your baby will grow quickly. You will need to follow your meal plan to help your baby grow. The extra food along with the effect of placental hormones will increase your insulin needs. Insulin needs may double or triple from your pre-pregnancy insulin needs if you have Type 1 diabetes. Your doctor will continue to adjust your insulin to meet your body’s needs.
How do I control my diabetes during pregnancy?

Follow a daily routine:
• Regular meals
• Insulin injections before meals and bedtime
• Moderate exercise

Blood sugar testing gives an accurate picture of your diabetes control. Test your blood sugar at home as often as you are directed. Keep an accurate record of your results and be sure to bring these results to each doctor’s visit. You may also need to test your urine for ketones as instructed by your doctor or nurse. Keep a record of your urine checks also.

How often do I need to check my blood sugar level?

Blood sugar testing may be needed 4 to 8 times a day at home. The test is done by sticking the finger for a drop of blood. The blood is put on a test strip in a meter. Your goal is to keep your blood sugar level between 60 to 120 mg/dl. If you do not know how to use a glucose meter, your nurse will teach you.

Will my baby be healthy?

If your diabetes has been well controlled during your pregnancy, your chances of having a healthy baby are about the same as a mother who does not have diabetes. However, if your blood sugar level is not kept at near normal level, your baby may have a number of problems. To find out how healthy your baby is, your doctor may order tests to monitor the heart rate and activity levels. This is in addition to blood and urine tests and ultrasound testing.

If blood sugar levels are poorly controlled in the first three months of pregnancy, babies of mothers with diabetes have a higher rate of birth defects. Sometimes babies of mothers with diabetes are large (over nine pounds), which can make delivery more difficult. Keeping near normal blood sugar levels can prevent this. These babies also may have low blood sugar after birth. They are watched closely in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) after delivery as needed. The key to helping prevent problems for your baby is to keep your blood sugar level as close to normal as possible.

Will I have complications?

The number and type of complications depends on several factors. One of them includes control of blood sugar. Other factors are related to how your general health has been affected by your diabetes. In general, if your blood sugar level was under control before your pregnancy, complications from diabetes will be fewer.

A complication that is common to mothers with diabetes is the development of preeclampsia. Preeclampsia begins at conception, but symptoms do not show until after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Symptoms include severe swelling, high blood pressure and protein in the urine. Treatment for this condition is very important for your health and the health of your baby, Discuss symptoms of preeclampsia with your doctor or nurse.
What are the chances of my baby having diabetes?
The chances of your baby having diabetes at birth are small. Most children of mothers with Type 1 diabetes never develop diabetes. Babies whose mothers have Type 2 diabetes may develop diabetes later in life as an adult. Talk to your doctor or nurse about your concerns.

Can I breastfeed my baby?
After delivery your insulin needs will decrease if you have Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes. Your insulin will be adjusted over several days. This should not affect your choice to breastfeed. Your body will need proper nutrition, including simple sugars, to produce milk. You will need to increase your calories by about 500 calories each day. Your dietitian, doctor and nurse will help you adjust your diet and insulin to meet your and your baby’s nutritional needs.

What does all this mean?
The more you know about diabetes in pregnancy, the easier it will be for you to control your blood sugar and prevent problems. Many professionals can help you, but you are responsible for your day to day care. By taking good care of yourself, you will increase your chances of having a safe pregnancy and a healthy, normal baby.

Feelings about being pregnant and having diabetes
- It is important to understand how being pregnant can affect your diabetes control. Your diet and medicines may need to be changed often.
- During your pregnancy, situations may arise that require you to be on bed rest or to be admitted to the hospital. Discuss with your family and friends how they may be of help during this time.
- Identify problems that may cause you to worry, such as financial concerns and child care issues. Our Social Worker will be able to help. Please call and let us know problems or concerns you have.
- Several times a day go to a quiet place and concentrate on relaxing. It is helpful to imagine yourself in a peaceful place while you close your eyes.
- If you are having problems controlling your diabetes, do not see yourself as a failure. There are many people willing to help, and all you have to do is call.

Keep your clinic appointments and follow medical advice to help you have a safe pregnancy and a healthy baby.