

You can do it! Breastfeeding with diabetes



Breastfeeding with diabetes is good for you and your baby.

When you breastfeed, it:

- Helps you lose weight after pregnancy
- Helps to prevent obesity
- Lowers your need for insulin
- Helps control your blood glucose levels as your body adjusts after birth
- Helps your body to use insulin effectively

During your pregnancy

It's important to take care of yourself during your pregnancy. Getting ready to breastfeed is one of the ways you can help your baby to be healthy.

About half of babies born to mothers who have diabetes may have low blood sugar soon after birth. So, it is very important for you to speak with your baby's doctor about how to monitor their glucose levels after your baby is born.

If you have Type 1 diabetes, talk to your doctor about nighttime insulin dosages, calorie needs, and snacks before each breastfeeding.

If available, speak with a lactation consultant to talk about breastfeeding. Learn how to express colostrum (the first form of milk produced immediately following delivery) from your breasts before your baby is born (colostrum harvesting) in case breastfeeding is delayed and/or your breast milk needs to be supplemented in the hospital.

After your baby is born

Keep your baby skin-to-skin with you. Skin-to-skin contact immediately after birth keeps your baby warm and helps to start breastfeeding. It keeps your baby's blood sugar levels from dropping.

If your breast milk needs to be supplemented, your baby may have access to receive colostrum or milk from a human milk bank instead of using formula. Ask your pediatrician for more information on how to receive milk supplements for your baby.

Did you know?

There are three basic types of diabetes. Breastfeeding is helpful with all types.

Type 1 diabetes

- The pancreas does not produce enough insulin
- Requires insulin injections

Type 2 diabetes

- Obesity, inactivity, and high blood pressure increase the risk for this type of diabetes
- Can be managed by diet and/or oral medicine
- May be switched to insulin during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Gestational diabetes

- Occurs during pregnancy
- Can go away after pregnancy, though it may reoccur
- Women with gestational diabetes who breastfeed can decrease their risk and their baby's risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

Breastfeed soon after birth

It's recommended that new mothers breastfeed soon after birth and often. This will stimulate milk production and stabilize your baby's blood glucose level. If there are times you cannot breastfeed, express your milk until you are able to put your baby to breast.

Place your baby skin-to-skin on your chest. Move baby to breast when baby shows feeding cues.

Feeding cues

- Sucking movements of the mouth and tongue
- Hand-to-mouth movements
- Body movements - turns head towards breast, kicking feet
- Small sounds

It's important to watch for these signs of swallowing:

- When the underside of your baby's chin drops down long, slow and deep, that's a swallow. If the movement is short, quick and shallow, it's a suck.
- Some babies make small noises when they swallow, like clicking or a light sigh.

If your baby doesn't swallow after every one to three sucks:

- Massage and squeeze the breast each time baby stops between sucks.
- This helps to get more colostrum into your baby and keeps him or her sucking longer.

Source: International Lactation Consultant Association

Suggested breastfeeding schedule

- Put your baby to your breast within one hour after birth
- Nurse every two to three hours until 12 hours of age
- Nurse at least ten or more times each 24 hours during your hospital stay

For more information about breastfeeding with diabetes, speak with your healthcare team.



While at the hospital, your blood glucose will be monitored. Meal plans often include three meals and three small snacks. Eating something before breastfeeding will help you get into a healthy eating routine and keep your blood glucose steady. Ask a lactation consultant to help you develop a plan of how you will feed your baby at home.

After you go home

Diabetes may delay the rapid increase in milk usually seen on day three. It may take a day or two longer for your milk to increase in volume.

- Breastfeed 10 or more times each day until your milk supply increases.
- Check for at least six wet diapers and at least three bowel movements every 24 hours after the first three days.

Take your baby to see his or her doctor for a weight check a day or two after you go home.

It is best to wait until your baby is six months old to introduce cereal or other foods. This may help protect your baby from developing diabetes.

Taking care of yourself

Make sure to monitor your blood sugar closely.

- Your blood sugar may fluctuate while you breastfeed.
- Drink a lot of fluid to stay hydrated.
- Continue with meal plan.

If you have Type 1 diabetes, you may have low blood sugar within an hour after breastfeeding.

- Eat a healthy snack with carbohydrate and protein before or while nursing.
- Keep a snack, glucose tablets, or fast-acting sugars in places where you nurse in case of an emergency.

Work with a lactation consultant to help avoid sore nipples as your baby learns to latch on.

Breastfeeding mothers with diabetes are at an increased risk for a yeast infection or a breast infection (mastitis). Make sure to feed from both breasts and notify your doctor if you suspect an infection.

