Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM) Meal Plan

Why do I need a GDM meal plan?

If you have gestational [je-STAY-shun-uhl] diabetes mellitus (GDM), you and your developing baby are likely to have high blood glucose (too much glucose, or "sugar," in the blood). This can cause problems for both of you during the pregnancy, during delivery, and in the years to come.

Following a meal plan is one of the most important ways to help manage your blood glucose and lower health risks. Your healthcare provider will help you decide on a meal plan that works for you. This handout provides a blank plan for you to fill out and use.

Meal plan basics

Meal plans for GDM tackle a few basic ideas:

- **Carbohydrates ("carbs") matter.** All foods contain some combination of carbohydrates, fat, and protein. Fat and protein affect your blood glucose over many hours, but carbs affect it much faster. For this reason, you'll need to manage how many carbs you eat each day. Your healthcare provider will show you how, and your meal plan will help you stay on track.
- **Nutrition matters.** Pregnancy is an important time to focus on making healthy food choices. Nutritious foods support your baby's growth and development, help manage your GDM, and keep you feeling good. Your meal plan supports healthy choices.
- **Timing and portions matter.** Your blood glucose will be best managed during pregnancy by following a meal pattern with similar timing and carbohydrate portions. Your meal plan gives you targets for when and how much to eat.

Use the Intermountain **Meal Plan Basics** handout to help you manage your GDM, nourish your growing baby, and keep you feeling well.

Common questions about GDM meal plans

Which foods are considered carbohydrates?

For your meal plan, only a few types of foods are counted as carbs — starches, fruits, dairy, and non-starchy vegetables. The Meal Plan Basics handout gives examples and portion sizes for these types of foods.

Should I aim for a very low-carb diet — like the Keto diet?

No. You (and your baby) need carbohydrates to stay healthy. Follow your meal plan to know when and how much carbohydrate to include in your meals and snacks.

Do I need to count calories?

It depends. Some women with GDM need to count calories, but many others don't. Your meal plan will list all of the targets you need to aim for — and your healthcare provider can answer any questions.

How do I know if my eating plan is working to manage my GDM?

A healthcare provider will show you how to test your blood glucose several times a day. Your testing results will show how well your GDM is managed and whether your treatment should be adjusted. You'll also be checked during your regular prenatal visits.

Six steps

Your meal plan will give you goals for the whole day and for each meal and snack. But you may not always have your plan with you to help you remember. By following these 6 simple steps, you can help manage your blood glucose levels:

1 **Eat small, frequent meals and snacks.** Eat small amounts of food about every 2 to 3 hours. Spreading your carbohydrates evenly throughout the day helps keep blood glucose levels stable.

2 **In every meal and snack, include some healthy protein.** Protein helps you feel satisfied and full of energy throughout the day and helps even out your blood glucose. This could be small amounts of meat, meat substitute (like eggs or peanut butter), or dairy foods.

3 **Eat a small breakfast with adequate protein.** When you have GDM, you tend to be more insulin-resistant first thing in the morning. This can cause blood glucose levels to be higher.

4 **Choose high-fiber foods.** Good sources include whole-grain breads and cereals, fresh and frozen vegetables, and beans. Fruits are also a good source of fiber, but are easily absorbed and tend to raise blood glucose levels quickly. It is best to wait until later in the day (lunchtime and beyond) to have fruits.

5 **Limit sugars and concentrated sweets.** Sweets raise your blood glucose quickly and significantly without giving your body the nutrition it needs. Here are some tips:

- Avoid sugary sweetened drinks of any kind. Sugar-free, calorie-free versions do not raise blood glucose and are acceptable now and then.
- Avoid fruit juices. Even 100% pure fruit juice has a lot of carbs and will raise blood glucose quickly. Eat the whole fruit instead of juice.
- Limit desserts such as ice cream, pies, cakes, cookies, and other sweets. These foods often have large amounts of sugar, honey, or other sweeteners such as sucrose, fructose, corn syrup, dextrose, molasses, or fruit juices.
- Read labels carefully and check them for total carbohydrates per serving.

6 **Be careful about fat.** Although fat does not directly affect your blood glucose level, fat can contribute to a lot of extra calories and cause excess weight gain during pregnancy. This puts you at higher risk for type 2 diabetes later in life. Follow these suggestions:

- Choose lean meats with lots of protein. Chicken, turkey, lean beef, ham, and fish are good choices. Limit bologna, salami, pepperoni, bacon, sausage, and hotdogs.
- Cut off all visible fat by removing the skin of chicken and turkey and trimming fat off meat.
- Use low-fat cooking methods such as baking, broiling, steaming, boiling, or grilling.
- Avoid frying. If you do fry foods, use nonstick pans, vegetable oil spray, or small amounts (1 to 2 teaspoons) of liquid oils.
- Use skim or low-fat (1%) milk and dairy products.
- Limit your amount of extra fat servings of things like butter, margarine, cream cheese, and full-fat salad dressings.
- Stay away from convenience foods. These are often higher in carbohydrate, fat, and sodium.
- Avoid instant noodles, canned soup, instant potatoes, frozen meals, and packaged foods.

Tips for staying healthy

- **Follow the rest of your GDM treatment plan.** Your meal plan may be just one part of your treatment. Follow your healthcare team's advice for daily testing, exercise, and/or medicine.
- **Keep taking your daily prenatal vitamin** as directed by your doctor or midwife.
- **Don't drink alcohol.** No amount of alcohol is considered safe for a growing baby.
- **Stay in touch.** Contact your healthcare provider with any questions or concerns about your meal plan or your pregnancy. Keep your appointments for monthly prenatal visits with your provider.
- **Enjoy your pregnancy.** Remember that most babies born to women with GDM are healthy. Follow your treatment plan, try not to worry, and look forward to meeting your baby.

Meal Plan

Name: _____ Date: _____

Dietitian: _____ Phone: _____

If you're counting carbohydrates, remember: 1 choice = 15 grams of carbohydrate

Choices *Choose foods wisely, watch your portions*	**Menu Ideas** *Enjoy your food!*
Breakfast ☐ Carbohydrate: _____ grams ☐ Non-starchy vegetables: _____ servings per day ☐ Protein: _____ grams ☐ Fat: _____ grams	
Snack ☐ Carbohydrate: _____ grams ☐ Non-starchy vegetables: _____ servings per day ☐ Protein: _____ grams ☐ Fat: _____ grams	
Lunch ☐ Carbohydrate: _____ grams ☐ Non-starchy vegetables: _____ servings per day ☐ Protein: _____ grams ☐ Fat: _____ grams	
Snack ☐ Carbohydrate: _____ grams ☐ Non-starchy vegetables: _____ servings per day ☐ Protein: _____ grams ☐ Fat: _____ grams	
Dinner ☐ Carbohydrate: _____ grams ☐ Non-starchy vegetables: _____ servings per day ☐ Protein: _____ grams ☐ Fat: _____ grams	
Snack ☐ Carbohydrate: _____ grams ☐ Non-starchy vegetables: _____ servings per day ☐ Protein: _____ grams ☐ Fat: _____ grams	

©2010–2026 Intermountain Health. All rights reserved. The content presented here is for your information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, and it should not be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns. FS063 - 03/26 (Last reviewed - 03/26) Also available in Spanish.