

# Screening for Diabetes During Pregnancy

DIABETES CARE PROGRAM OF NOVA SCOTIA

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# Screening for Diabetes During Pregnancy

## Why should I be screened for diabetes during my pregnancy?

- Nova Scotia has high rates of diabetes.
- Pregnancy hormones increase your chances of developing **gestational diabetes** (diabetes that only develops during pregnancy).
- You may have **overt diabetes** (diabetes that was there before you got pregnant) and not know. Pregnancy hormones make this diabetes harder to manage.
- Having diabetes during your pregnancy increases the risks for you and your baby.
- Finding diabetes early can help you have a healthy pregnancy and baby. This means making healthy food choices, managing your blood glucose, and having regular visits to your diabetes health care team.
- If you have gestational diabetes and manage it well, you may also lower your risk of developing diabetes later in life.

## When should I be screened?

- Screening should be done **with your first pregnancy bloodwork**, or as early in your pregnancy as possible.

## What tests are used to screen early in pregnancy?

- You will have a blood test called **A1C** (glycated hemoglobin).
- Another blood test, a **fasting plasma glucose**, is added if you are at **higher risk** for diabetes (see the list below), have kidney disease, and/or an inherited (passed down in families) condition that affects your red blood cells (like sickle cell anemia or thalassemia).

### You are at higher risk for diabetes if you:

- › had prediabetes before you got pregnant.
- › have had gestational diabetes in a past pregnancy.
- › are having multiples (like twins or triplets).
- › have a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher.
- › have Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS).
- › use corticosteroids (like prednisone).
- › are from a high-risk population (like Indigenous, African Canadian, South Asian, or Hispanic).

## What if my early screening results are normal?

- You should be **tested again** later in your pregnancy, between 24 and 28 weeks. This time the type of testing will be different. Some individuals will have 2 tests on 2 different days.
- The first test is the **glucose challenge test (GCT)**.
  - › You will be asked to drink a sugary liquid that has 50-grams of glucose in it. Your blood will be taken 1 hour later.
  - › This test can be given at any time of the day.
  - › **Do not fast for this test.** Eat regularly, and follow your usual activity and exercise habits.
  - › If this test is slightly higher than normal, some individuals will need another test.

- The 2nd test is an **oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT)**. It will be booked on another day.
  - › You will be asked to drink a sugary liquid that has 75-grams of glucose in it. Your blood will be taken 3 times during this test: before you take the drink, and then 1 hour and 2 hours after you finish the drink.
  - › **You must fast** (not eat or drink anything except water) for 8 to 10 hours before this test.

## **Why are these 2 tests so important?**

- These tests show how your body uses glucose (sugar) and how pregnancy hormones are affecting your glucose levels.
- There are **no** risks to you or your baby when taking these blood tests.

## **What if I was not screened early in my pregnancy?**

- If you were not screened early, you should be tested at 24 to 28 weeks, starting with the glucose challenge test. This will be followed by the 75-gram OGTT, as needed.

## How do I get ready for the 75-gram OGTT?

### In the days leading up to the test:

- **Do not** change your eating habits (what you eat and when), as this may change your test results.
- If you have a cold, flu, or other illness on the day of your test, rebook your appointment. Try to book no more than a few days later.

### On the day of the 75-gram OGTT test:

#### For 8 hours before the test:

- **Do not** eat, drink, smoke, or exercise. You may drink small sips of water.
- You will have 5 minutes to drink the sugary liquid.
- The test may take up to 3 hours.
- During the test, you will be asked:
  - › to sit quietly the whole time, as activity can change your results.
  - › not leave the lab area.
  - › not to eat. You can bring a snack to eat after the test.

- A blood sample will be taken just before the drink is given. This tells us your fasting blood glucose value. Depending on this value, you may not need to take the drink.
- A blood sample will be taken **1 and 2 hours** after you have finished the sugary drink.

**Remember:** Blood collection staff cannot give you the results of the test. Your primary health care provider will go over the results with you.

## **How are these blood tests arranged?**

- You will be given a requisition (a form used by the lab) to arrange your own screening tests. This will be given to you by your prenatal (during pregnancy) care provider.
- Depending on the test and the timing of the test, your doctor's office may book this for you.
- These screening tests are done at a blood collection lab. Check with your local lab as not all labs do the OGTT.
- Booking can be done online or by phone.
- Plan ahead. It is important to have these tests at the right time in your pregnancy.

# Notes:

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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources](http://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources)

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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