

Screening for Diabetes After Pregnancy

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**Diabetes Care Program
of Nova Scotia**



www.nshealth.ca

Screening for Diabetes After Pregnancy

Should I be screened for diabetes after my pregnancy?

- Yes, screening should happen if:
 - › you had **gestational diabetes** (diabetes found during your pregnancy).
- OR**
- › your screening results during pregnancy showed that you may have **overt diabetes** (diabetes that was there before you got pregnant).

When is the best time to be screened?

- Screening for diabetes is needed between 6 weeks and 6 months after the birth of your baby.
- Screening should happen earlier (6 to 8 weeks after the birth of your baby) if your screening results during pregnancy showed that you may have overt diabetes.

Why is screening helpful?

- If you had gestational diabetes, you are at risk for, or may have, type 2 diabetes. When screened after pregnancy, **1 in 3** people with gestational diabetes are found to have diabetes, or blood sugar that is higher than normal, when screened after pregnancy.
- **If you have diabetes and do not know you have it, you are at risk for diabetes complications.** These include changes to your eyes (vision), vaginal or urinary tract infections (UTIs), and heart and kidney problems that can develop over time.
- Having diabetes also means that you have a higher risk of problems in future pregnancies. Finding diabetes early and managing it can lower these risks.

What if I do not want to be screened?

- It is your choice, and if you are scared, this is normal. Knowing about your body will help in the decisions you make. It is important to find out if you have diabetes so you can manage it and lower your risk of complications.

What tests are used to screen after pregnancy?

- For most, a **75-gram oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT)** is required. This is a sugary liquid that you drink when you are at the lab. Your blood will be taken before you take the drink, and then 2 hours after you finish the drink.
- If your health care provider thinks that you may have overt diabetes, you may have only a **fasting plasma glucose test**.
- For both tests, **you must fast** (not eat or drink anything except water) for 8 to 10 hours before the test.
- There are no risks to you by doing these blood tests.

Why are these tests so important?

- These blood tests show how your body handles glucose (sugar) now that the pregnancy hormones are gone.

How are these blood tests arranged?

- You will be given a requisition (a form used by the lab) to arrange your own screening test.
- Depending on 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.

How will I remember and find the time for this screening test?

- Plan ahead. It is important to have these tests between 6 weeks and 6 months after the birth of your baby.
- Book the test the same week as one of your doctor's visits. In this way you will not forget. This could be a few days before the 6-week check-up after the birth of your baby.
- To help with planning, ask a family member or a friend to look after your baby.

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:

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 **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.

What will happen if I have diabetes?

- Your diabetes health care team will help you and your family make a plan that is right for you.

I am breast/chestfeeding. Can I still have this test?

- **Yes.** You can be breast/chestfeeding and still have this test. Depending on the results of the OGTT, another test may be needed after you stop breast/chestfeeding your baby.

What steps should I take to prevent or manage diabetes?

- Slowly lose the weight you gained during your pregnancy.
- Choose healthy foods. Eat at regular times during the day.
- Be active. Plan for regular walks with your baby.
- Try to get good sleep. Rest when your baby sleeps.

What if my screening test after pregnancy is normal?

- If you had **gestational diabetes**, you are at risk for having it again in future pregnancies.
- Screen for diabetes **before you get pregnant again**.
- You should be screened for diabetes every 1 to 3 years.

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

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

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