

Gestational diabetes and physical activity



If you have gestational diabetes, physical activity can be very beneficial. This fact sheet gives you tips on how to get moving during your pregnancy.

How can physical activity help me?

The majority of women with gestational diabetes can be physically active. This helps to:

- better control diabetes
- bring blood sugar levels (glycemia) back to normal by avoiding high blood sugar levels (hyperglycemia)
- delay starting insulin or reduce the dose needed
- avoid too much weight gain

Moving more can also:

- help you feel better during pregnancy (better sleep, less stress, less back pain, less depression and anxiety, etc.)
- increase your energy
- help you recover more quickly after the birth and reduce the risk of complications

Physical activity **does not increase** the risk of miscarriage in any way!

There are certain cases, however, when it is better not to do physical activity during pregnancy (heavy bleeding, placenta too low, for example). If you're not sure, check with your doctor.

How can I be more active during my pregnancy?

Being active by doing things you enjoy is easier than you think. It can fit right in with your day-to-day activities. Here are some ideas and tips to help you adopt or maintain an active and healthy lifestyle.

- If you weren't very active before pregnancy, start slowly and go at your own pace. Set realistic goals (such as, I'm going to walk 20 minutes a day or every other day for the next 3 weeks)
- Choose an activity or activities you enjoy and know well. Avoid activities that are too rough or involve physical contact (such as team sports, combat sports, downhill skiing, horseback riding), where you risk falling. Choose, for example, walking, swimming, prenatal aquafitness, cycling, gentle gymnastics, and expressive body movement activities. Running is okay during the first 2 trimesters of pregnancy, if you've done it before.



- Be sure to maintain a moderate intensity during the activity. This means you're breathing faster, but not too fast: you should be able to talk all the time during the effort.



ATTENTION

Listen to your body, respect your physical condition and your energy level. Drink water regularly and avoid becoming overheated.

- Aim for 2.5 hours of activity per week, spread over at least 3 sessions. This can be divided into small periods of at least 10 minutes a day (such as going for a walk after lunch, climbing stairs, etc.). Preferably, do one activity at least every 2 days.

You can start by doing 3 to 5 exercise sessions of about 10 to 15 minutes each week. Soon, you may be able to move up to sessions of 30 to 45 minutes, which will give you 2.5 hours a week!



If you take insulin

Physical exercise is still very beneficial. Just take certain precautions, because exercising while taking insulin injections can lower blood sugar levels too much (hypoglycemia).



Should I change the place where I inject?

If you need to inject insulin before exercising, do it into your abdomen. Avoid the muscles that will be working the hardest during your exercise. For example, if you're jogging, don't inject it into your thigh, otherwise the insulin may be absorbed too quickly.

Doing or not doing physical activity depends on my blood sugar level

Measure your blood sugar level before starting any physical activity that takes longer than 30 minutes, especially if you haven't eaten for 2 hours or more. Then follow these guidelines depending on your blood sugar level.

UNDER 3.7 MMOL/L

You're hypoglycemic. Treat yourself as instructed. Before starting your physical activity, follow the instructions on the next page according to your blood sugar level.

During physical activity, watch for signs of hypoglycemia. You're at greater risk for it.

3.7 TO 4.9 MMOL/L

Have a 15-gram carbohydrate snack and then you can exercise.

Have a 10-gram to 15-gram carbohydrate snack every half-hour.

5.0 TO 9.9 MMOL/L

You can exercise.

If you're planning a long outing, take a 10-gram to 15-gram carbohydrate snack every hour.

10 MMOL/L OR MORE

Start with 10 minutes of exercise and measure your blood sugar level again. If it's between 5.0 and 9.9 mmol/L, keep going. If not, stop.



It's important to have 15-gram carbohydrate snacks on hand during physical activity, such as:

- one fruit
- one « fruit to go »
- 1/2 cup (125 ml) unsweetened fruit juice or no-sugar-added fruit compote
- one small 15-gram carbohydrate yogurt drink
- one 15-gram carbohydrate snack bar

Hypoglycemia symptoms

The first signs to watch for are:

- shivering
- sweating
- urgent hunger
- paleness

If you have any of these during physical activity, stop. Check your blood sugar. If you have hypoglycemia, treat it as instructed.

What should I do once I've finished my exercise?

If you're taking insulin, measure your blood sugar level to make sure you're not at risk of hypoglycemia.

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

Don't hesitate to contact a member of your health care team. They will give you all the advice you need.

If you can't reach anyone or the clinic is closed, you can call the **CHUM Patient Health Line**.



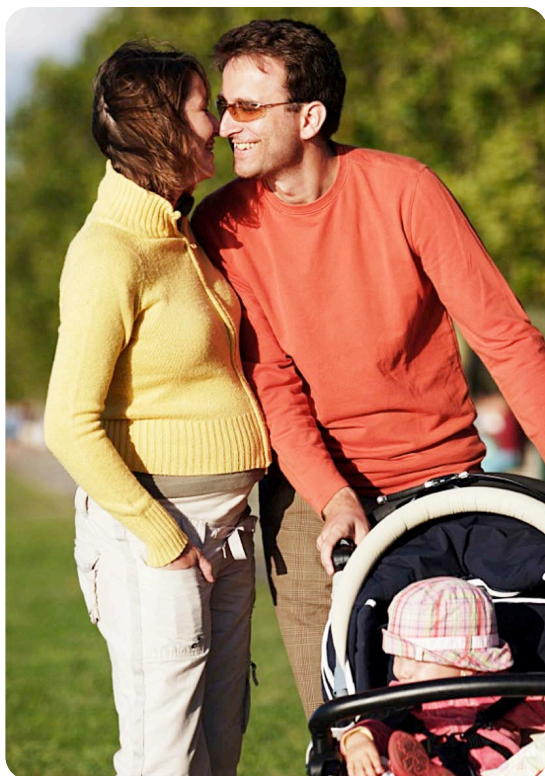
CHUM PATIENT HEALTH LINE

514 890-8086

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

You're a CHUM patient? You have questions about your health status? A nurse can help you.





Keep in mind

- Physical activity during pregnancy has many benefits!
- Take it one step at a time, with activities you enjoy.
- Don't overdo it, which will tire you out.
- Don't get too hot, to avoid dehydration.
- Have 15-gram carbohydrate snacks on hand.
- If you take insulin: test your blood sugar before and after your physical activities.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Fact sheet

[Gestational diabetes.](#)

[Treating gestational diabetes with insulin](#)

Physical activity:

www.education.gouv.qc.ca

Click on English in the top right corner.

Type "active for two" into the search bar → Active for Two: Physical Activity During and After Pregnancy.

www.pregnancyinfo.ca

Tabs: Your pregnancy → Healthy pregnancy → Exercise during pregnancy.

Diabetes Québec:

1 800 361-3504

www.diabete.qc.ca

Click on English in the top right corner.

Diabetes Canada:

1 800 226-8464

www.diabetes.ca

To learn more about pregnancy, delivery, or follow-up care, visit our internet site.



Videos, other fact sheets, and more resources are available at:

centredesnaissanceschum.com

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
www.chumontreal.qc.ca