

Infant of a Diabetic Mother

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition where there is too much sugar in the blood. Blood sugar is normally controlled by insulin. When blood sugar rises after meals, the body responds by putting insulin into the blood stream. The insulin helps the sugar get into the body's cells to use for energy and growth. If you have diabetes there is not enough insulin released by the body causing blood sugar to be abnormally high.

How does diabetes in the mother affect the baby before birth?

When a mother's blood sugar is high, sugar travels across the placenta to the baby and leads to high blood sugar in the baby. The baby makes extra insulin in response to this extra sugar. This extra insulin in the baby's blood and changes that occur in the placenta of a diabetic mother can lead to the following problems:

1. Large babies
The high sugar and high insulin together may make the baby grow larger than normal.
2. Small babies
This is rare and occurs when the mother has had diabetes for several years and has changes in her blood vessels and the placenta.

Could there be complications at birth?

Normally the head is the largest part of the baby and comes out first. If the head gets through the rest of the body slips through easily. In infants of diabetic mothers the shoulders may be larger which may result in complications at birth.

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What problems do these babies have after birth?

1. Low blood sugar
When babies are born they don't get sugar from their mothers. These babies can have too much insulin for the amount of sugar they intake. This will cause the blood sugar level to fall.
2. Breathing problems
3. Polycythemia
This means too many red blood cells. If there are only a little more than normal, it will not need to be treated. If the number of red blood cells is very high, it will cause the blood to become very thick and decrease the flow in the blood vessels. Very thick blood also clots easily and can sometimes produce unwanted clots. This problem can be treated easily if needed.
4. Premature infants
Sometimes infants of diabetic mothers are born early and those babies may have other common problems of premature infants.

Will my baby develop diabetes later on?

Being an infant of a diabetic mother does not mean the baby will have diabetes later on or in adult life. Diabetes does run in families meaning these babies are at the same risk as other family members. This may make them at a slightly higher risk than the general population of developing diabetes.

Please talk to the staff if you want more information about diabetes.

Interpreter Services

Professional interpreters are available if you need help understanding or speaking in English. You may have a family member or friend present, but all communication about your baby's treatment should be through a professional interpreter. Interpreter services are free and confidential.

It is your right to ask for an interpreter if one is not offered to you. The staff will book the interpreter for you.

If you need to use an interpreter to contact us, please call the telephone Translating and Interpreter Service on 131 450.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of this information, please send an email: SESLHD-RHWfeedback@health.nsw.gov.au