

Taking metformin for gestational diabetes

This information sheet will help you understand more about taking metformin for gestational diabetes. This information sheet is not a substitute for talking with your midwife, doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Gestational diabetes

Gestational diabetes means you have too much glucose (a type of sugar) in your blood when you are pregnant. Insulin controls the amount of glucose in your blood. Sometimes you don't make enough insulin or it doesn't work as well when you are pregnant.

Gestational diabetes is common. Up to eight pregnant women in every 100 get gestational diabetes.

It can be hard to tell if you have gestational diabetes. Some women find that they:

- lack energy
- feel thirsty a lot
- go to the toilet a lot
- get lots of infections.

Some women have no symptoms. This is why all pregnant women are tested for diabetes so they can get treatment.

Metformin

Metformin is a medicine that has been used for many years to lower blood glucose. It helps insulin to work better in your body. It slows down sugar from your food getting into your blood.

Metformin works best if you eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.

Metformin is a tablet that you take two or three times a day with food.

Taking metformin for gestational diabetes

Untreated gestational diabetes can affect you and your baby. The risks for you and your baby increase as your blood glucose gets higher.

Risks for you, the mum:

- high blood pressure (called preeclampsia)
- diabetes later in life
- caesarean section.

Risks for your baby:

- may grow larger than normal (this increases the risk of injury during birth)
- born too early (premature)
- low blood glucose after birth
- may need treatment in hospital
- jaundice (yellow skin) that needs treatment
- breathing problems.

Taking metformin helps reduce these risks.

You can see how many women and babies are affected and how treatment helps in the picture on the next page.

Metformin is safe to take for gestational diabetes

Metformin has been tested in clinical studies and is safe to take for gestational diabetes.

Metformin helps keep both your weight gain and blood pressure down.

The main side effect is stomach upsets such as feeling sick and diarrhoea. Taking metformin with food helps stop stomach problems. If you have a side effect, tell your doctor and report it to the Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring (see below).

You will need to check the amount of glucose in your blood throughout your pregnancy.

Metformin is safe for baby

Metformin taken for gestational diabetes is safe for your baby. By lowering your blood glucose it reduces all the risks for your baby listed above.

Compared to insulin treatment your baby is also:

- more likely to be a normal weight
- less likely to have low blood glucose
- less likely to need treatment in hospital.

Metformin has no effect on children's development.

Other options

Insulin is also used to lower blood sugar in pregnancy.

Some women may need to take insulin and metformin. They work well together.

No matter what treatment you need, it is important to keep to a healthy diet and to exercise regularly.

Gestational diabetes after giving birth

Most women do not have diabetes after giving birth. However, if you do need to keep taking metformin it is safe to breastfeed.

Make sure you go for more testing if your doctor or nurse recommends it.

Find out more

Talk to your midwife, doctor or nurse.

Information on diabetes:

www.diabetes.org.nz/

Information on pregnancy:

www.health.govt.nz/your-health/pregnancy-and-kids/pregnancy

Information on medicines:

www.medsafe.govt.nz/Medicines/infoSearch.asp

Information on reporting side effects:

<https://nzphvc.otago.ac.nz/>

The difference that treatment of gestational diabetes makes for the mum and baby

The purple dots show how many are affected.

