

# askthespecialist

By Patricia A. Devine, M.D.



Patricia A. Devine, M.D., a maternal-fetal specialist at Sound Shore Medical Center in New Rochelle, discusses a patient's progress.

**Q:** My obstetrician says I have gestational diabetes. Did I do anything wrong?

**A:** Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM) is diabetes that *only* develops during pregnancy and usually disappears after the baby's birth. GDM can develop with any pregnancy. However, certain factors put a woman at greater risk: being 25 years or older; overweight; previous gestational diabetes; birthing a baby weighing more than nine pounds or a strong family history of diabetes. GDM prevents your body from using carbohydrates properly and this inability causes a build up of blood glucose (sugar).

During pregnancy, there is an increase in hormone levels and a resulting need for 30 percent more insulin. Most women handle

this change, but for about four percent of women, the insulin production – *needed to allow glucose to enter one's cells* – doesn't keep up with demand and results in excessive sugar in the blood – or gestational diabetes.

Most women are screened for GDM between 24 and 28 weeks' of gestation. With a GDM diagnosis, your obstetrician will refer you to a maternal-fetal medicine specialist and a diabetes educator, who will recommend an American Diabetes Association diet. For many, this is enough to keep the blood glucose under control – if not, insulin therapy may be added. The maternal-fetal medicine specialist provides increased monitoring of the fetus using ultrasound and nonstress tests.

In uncontrolled GDM, the fetus responds to the mother's increased blood glucose by growing faster and larger – called *macrosomia* or big baby syndrome. Because of the increased size, a cesarean section may be necessary to reduce complications. After birth, these babies can also experience low blood sugar, respiratory distress or jaundice.

Since GDM is associated with an increased risk to the mother of developing type 2 diabetes later in life, it is important to make healthy eating, weight control and exercise a part of one's lifestyle.

## AM I AT RISK?

Certain factors put a woman at greater risk for Gestational Diabetes Mellitus:

1. Being 25 years or older.
2. Being overweight.
3. Having previous gestational diabetes.
4. Birthing a baby weighing more than nine pounds.
5. A strong family history of diabetes.

## JUST ASK

Westchester Family invites you to send in your maternal or pediatric medical questions to this column. Email your letters to [jean.sheff@parenthood.com](mailto:jean.sheff@parenthood.com).

## Sound Shore Medical Center

Sound Shore Medical Center is a 252-bed, community-based, teaching hospital located in New Rochelle. The hospital is identified as a center of excellence for 1st Trimester Antepartum Screening and designated by New York State as a Perinatal Hospital. For further information call 637-5473. [www.soundshore.org](http://www.soundshore.org).