

Understanding GESTATIONAL DIABETES

Reduce the risk to you and baby with good habits and health care

Amy Lautenbach, 36, was surprised when she tested positive for gestational diabetes during her first pregnancy, because her only risk factor for the disease was her age. "I'm a marathon runner and my diet is very healthy," says the mom from Woodbury, MN. "Emotionally you feel a little disappointed in yourself, like, 'Why me?'"

Like other forms of diabetes, gestational diabetes manifests when the body's insulin levels no longer efficiently metabolize blood sugar, or glucose. But pregnancy itself triggers this form of the disease, which tends to disappear after the baby's birth.

WHAT HAPPENS? As a pregnancy progresses, placental hormones and weight gain block the action of insulin in the mother's body to ensure that the developing fetus gets enough glucose. Most women's systems secrete more insulin to compensate, but in 4 to 7 percent of women, this mechanism fails, at no fault of their own.

With her diagnosis, Lautenbach became one of at least 135,000 women who develop gestational diabetes each year. "Insulin resistance happens in all pregnancies to make the feeding of the baby more stable," says Teresa Hillier, M.D., a clinical assistant professor of endocrinology at Oregon Health Sciences University in Portland. "Some women don't have enough reserve insulin to accommodate for that, and they get gestational diabetes."



BY ● SARA AASE

WHAT ARE THE RISKS? Gestational diabetes can be a challenge for mom, but it has more potential to harm the fetus. "It's a disease of the mom, but it affects the baby," says Lois Brustman, M.D., a maternal-fetal medicine specialist and co-director of the Diabetes in Pregnancy Program at St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York City. Too much glucose, or hyperglycemia, "overfeeds" the baby in the womb. Left untreated, this can lead to problems during birth and a drastically higher, lifelong risk of being overweight or obese and developing type 2 diabetes.

Gestational diabetes also puts a mom at a much greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes. "There is a 60 percent chance women with gestational diabetes will have it again in a subsequent pregnancy, or will develop type 2 diabetes after the pregnancy," Brustman says.

The good news is that recent research

