

Diabetes During Pregnancy

Women of Color At Increased Risk

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Closing the Gap, Diabetes • September/October 2002

The pregnancy test is positive. The ultrasound eliminates all of your worries. Ten fingers, ten toes. With this comes the anticipation of motherhood. Sorting through names and picking furniture for the nursery becomes your most enjoyable past time. Yet, for some women—particularly women of color—an uneventful pregnancy can suddenly come to screeching halt. An often routinely performed blood test at about six months can confirm the presence of high blood sugar or gestational diabetes (GD).

Throughout the United States, especially among minority women, gestational diabetes is one of the most important health concerns related to pregnancy—yet one that far too many women know little about.

GD is a type of diabetes that only pregnant women get. Approximately seven percent of all pregnancies are complicated by GD—resulting in more than 200,000 cases annually.

Nationally, GD occurs more frequently among African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and American Indians. However, some local studies indicate that GD is extremely high in some Asian American communities. After pregnancy, 5 to 10 percent of women with GD are found to have type 2 diabetes. Women who have had GD have a 20 to 50 percent chance of developing diabetes within 5 to 10 years following pregnancy.

Throughout a pregnancy, GD requires treatment to normalize maternal blood sugar levels to avoid complications both to the mother and child. Women who go untreated may have a harder time with labor, and GD increases their chance of delivering surgically. Complications that can arise in infants include: jaundice, hypoglycemia or low blood sugar level, and respiratory distress syndrome which makes it hard for them to breathe.

High-Risk Ethnic Groups

Women who are overweight or obese, over age 25, have a family history of diabetes or has had gestational diabetes with a past pregnancy, and those who've had a very large baby or stillbirth in the past are at risk for GD. Likewise, it has been determined that some women of color have a higher incidence of developing diabetes during pregnancy. More specifically:

➤ **African American.** Like type 2 diabetes, GD occurs more often in women of color, resulting in high cases of GD among African Americans. In fact, according to the National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Disease (NIDDK), several studies have shown that the occurrence of GD in African American women may be 50 to 80 percent more frequent than in White women.

➤ **American Indian and Alaska Natives.** Both long- and short-term consequences of diabetes during pregnancy are evident in American Indians and Alaska Natives. Congenital abnormalities in infants born to women with type 2 diabetes are as common as those observed in women with type 1 diabetes. Other complications seen in pregnancies in women with type 2 diabetes included increased rates of toxemia or pregnancy induced hypertension and perinatal mortality.

In fact, 45 percent of adult offspring of Pima Indian women who were diagnosed with type 2 diabetes predating pregnancy developed diabetes by age 20 to 24. In comparison, only 1.4 percent of adult offspring of women without diabetes during pregnancy went on to develop diabetes by age 24. The strongest single risk factor for diabetes in Pima children was exposure to diabetes in utero.

Follow up studies of American Indian women with gestational diabetes found a high risk of developing subsequent diabetes: 27.5 percent of Pima Indian women developed diabetes within 4 to 8 years, and 30 percent of Zuni Indians developed diabetes within 6 months to 9 years after pregnancy.

➤ **Asian American and Pacific Islanders.** According to NIDDK, nationally, Asian American women seem to have rates of gestational diabetes that are similar to those of White women in the United States. However, statistics based on an unpublished study conducted by Northern California Kaiser Permanente patients indicates that the prevalence of GD among Asian Americans was almost double the prevalence of GD among White women.

➤ **Hispanic/Latinos.** Mexican American women may be at particularly high risk for developing type 2 diabetes. One study of 666 women with gestational diabetes in southern California found that each year an average of 12 percent developed type 2 diabetes after pregnancy. Mexican American women, especially when they are overweight, have higher rates of gestational diabetes than White women. It has also been estimated that within 20 years of pregnancy, about half of the Latino women with gestational diabetes develop type 2 diabetes.

For more information, visit the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development Web site at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov>

