

Glucose Screening Test

Why do I need a glucose screening test during pregnancy?

Most healthcare practitioners routinely recommend a glucose screening test (also called a glucose challenge test or GCT) between 24 and 28 weeks of pregnancy to check for gestational diabetes.

Gestational diabetes is a high blood sugar condition that some women get during pregnancy. Between 2 and 5 percent of expectant mothers develop this condition, making it one of the most common health problems during pregnancy. And because the condition rarely causes any symptoms, testing is the only way to find out whether you have it.

Like any screening test, the GCT won't give you a diagnosis. Instead, it's designed to identify as many women as possible who may have a problem and need more testing to find out. So a positive result doesn't mean that you have gestational diabetes.

In fact, only about a third of women who test positive on the glucose screen actually have the condition. If you test positive on the screening, you'll need to take the 3 hr glucose tolerance test (GTT) – a longer, more definitive test that tells you for sure whether you have gestational diabetes.

Your practitioner may want you to be screened earlier than 24 weeks if a routine urine test shows a lot of sugar in your urine or if you're considered high risk. If the results are normal, you'll be screened again at 24 to 28 weeks.

How is the glucose screening test done?

- When you arrive for the test, you're given a sugar solution that contains 50 grams of glucose. The stuff tastes like a very sweet soda pop, and you have to get all of it down in five minutes.
- An hour later a blood sample is taken from your arm to check your blood sugar level. The idea is to see how efficiently your body processes sugar. The results should be available in a few days.
- If the reading is too high, which happens 15 to 23 percent of the time, you'll be asked to come back for a three-hour glucose tolerance test to see whether you really do have gestational diabetes. The good news is that most women whose screening test shows elevated blood sugar don't turn out to have gestational diabetes.

Will the test make me feel sick?

Some moms-to-be feel nauseated after drinking the glucose solution. It may help to eat something a few hours before the screening test. If you vomit soon after you've gotten the drink down, you'll have to come back on another day and repeat the test.