Diabetes and your Periods

The effect of periods on diabetes and things to consider

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What effect do periods have on diabetes?

- Most women and girls notice an increase in blood sugar levels before their period.
- A few experience hypoglycaemia.
- Many report their blood sugar tends to increase 3 to 5 days prior to the beginning of their period. Their blood sugar then returns to normal within the first few days after their period has started.

Why do periods affect blood sugar control?

1: Hormones

The hormones which control the menstrual cycle also affect blood sugar levels. There are 2 main hormones involved:

- Progesterone.
- Oestrogen.

These are at their highest levels before a period starts. It is thought that progesterone causes increased insulin resistance. More insulin is needed to keep blood sugars within recommended levels.

Although most women experience higher blood sugars before their period, some experience bouts of hypoglycaemia. This may be due to oestrogen, which can have the opposite effect on insulin sensitivity.

2: Food cravings

Cravings for carbohydrate can also occur in the days before a period starts. This may also help to explain any rise in blood sugar.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) (or mood swings) does not seem to be related to diabetes. Other possible menstruation side effects (including bloating and water retention) are also unrelated to diabetes.
How can you help to control blood sugar at the time of your period?

Every woman and girl is different. Some may find their blood sugar rises considerably before their period starts. Others do not notice a difference. A few may find their blood sugar drops before and during their period. You need to discover your own pattern.

1: Hormones

With type 1 diabetes (controlled with insulin injections) it is often the fasting blood sugar which rises before your period. Adjusting your overnight insulin often helps. When your period starts and you find your blood sugars drop, re-adjust your insulin to its old level. Take advice from your diabetes health care professional about this.

If you have type 2 diabetes and do not take insulin, it is important to exercise regularly during your period. This gives better blood sugar levels, more energy and fewer of the unpleasant menstruation side effects.

2: Food cravings

Alcohol, caffeine and chocolate may affect your mood. Omitting them from your diet around the time of your period may make you feel less edgy and less inclined to crave high carbohydrate, high GI (Glycaemic Index), high-sugar snacks.

General helpful hints

- Eat slowly absorbed carbohydrates, also known as low Glycaemic Index (GI) food, to help keep your blood sugars from swinging. They may also help to keep you feeling fuller for longer; so can stop you from overeating later. Some supermarkets indicate GI on food packaging. See list below.

- Try to eat regularly – and maybe snack more frequently. If you do snack, you may want to reduce your carbohydrate portions at meals to make room for snacking. Healthy snacks include fresh or dried fruit, low-fat yoghurt, slice of granary or multi-grain bread, malt loaf or oatcakes.
- Reduce your salt intake to help offset bloating and fluid retention.

- Try to do regular exercise. This may help to lower blood sugar and will help you to feel better emotionally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cereals and Breads</th>
<th>Porridge, Muesli, Bran based cereals Pita, Granary, Multi-grain, Rye Breads.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potato / Rice / Pasta / Pulses</td>
<td>New Potatoes, Sweet Potatoes, Basmati rice, Pasta, Noodles Lentils and other beans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit and Vegetables</td>
<td>Fresh fruit, fruit juices, and vegetables.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And finally

Some women have irregular periods and may find it difficult to work out if there is an effect and what it is on their blood sugars. In general, write down the dates of your periods to keep track. This helps identify when you get to the last few days. This is the time you may need to increase your insulin before the start of your period.

Remember! We are all individual. Periods are one of many factors that can influence blood sugars.

The birth control pill

If taking “the pill”, you may find your blood sugars are affected by the hormones which are in these pills to prevent you becoming pregnant and/or regulate your periods.

Discover your blood sugar level patterns when taking this and, if possible, adjust your diabetes medication and exercise as necessary. You may need to monitor several cycles before a pattern emerges.
Pregnancy and pre-pregnancy counselling
Before trying for a baby, please see your diabetes healthcare team first. It is essential you attend for pre-pregnancy advice and counselling to ensure all goes well when you become pregnant.

If you do have an unplanned pregnancy, inform the diabetes healthcare team at your local hospital immediately. Help with your diabetes as early as possible in pregnancy will help reduce risks of congenital malformations (deformities in your baby).

Most importantly – seek specialist advice before becoming pregnant.

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution
If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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