

When your patients are trying to conceive, it's an opportunity to talk to them about their lifestyle and work with them to develop healthy habits. This is incredibly important not only for a healthy pregnancy and baby, but also for the long-term health of moms-to-be.

A [recent study published](#) in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* revealed that expectant mothers who were more fit before pregnancy were at a lower risk of developing gestational diabetes. Each year, gestational diabetes (GDM) affects between 2 percent and 10 percent of U.S. pregnancies, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). And nearly 50 percent of women with gestational diabetes later develop type 2 diabetes.

This Mother's Day, which kicks off Women's Health Week, here are three ways to work with your patients who are moms-to-be, so they can enter pregnancies with healthy habits and lower their risk for gestational and type 2 diabetes.

### **1. Test patients' risk for prediabetes**

Typically, prediabetes has no symptoms, but your patients may have risk factors for the condition. Screening your patients for prediabetes risk factors using the [1-minute online risk test](#) can help you identify patients who may need further testing and a diabetes prevention plan.

The risk test:

- Is easy to incorporate into your practice
- Identifies factors that put patients at risk for type 2 diabetes
- Can be emailed to your patients and/or printed out and brought to an appointment

Once you've received the risk test and lab results, the [Prevent Diabetes STAT toolkit](#) can help you educate your patients about prediabetes and refer them to National Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) lifestyle change programs.

### **2. Create a prescription for fitness**

The study on expectant mothers analyzed data from more than 1,000 women over a 25-year period. Researchers measured baseline fitness with a graded symptom-limited maximal exercise treadmill test and also asked participants about their baseline physical activity.

Over the course of the study period, participants reported whether they became pregnant or gave birth and whether they developed gestational diabetes. Based on the findings, researchers determined that higher levels of objectively assessed pre-pregnancy fitness are associated with lower odds of GDM.

Referring patients who are at risk for prediabetes to a DPP lifestyle change program either locally or online may be an excellent way to help your patients develop a prescription plan for fitness. Participants of DPP programs receive coaching and develop the skills to make lasting changes to their lifestyle, including strategies to increase physical activity. Some strategies may include simple ways to get moving during the day such as opting out of an elevator ride in favor of taking the stairs or parking farther away from the entrance when visiting a shopping center.

Also, making exercise a priority by creating a schedule for it each week helps fitness become a habit.

### **3. Encourage other lifestyle changes**

Healthy eating is another beneficial component to lower a patient's risk for gestational diabetes. By participating in a diabetes prevention lifestyle change program that addresses healthier eating habits, participants can lose weight—and the weight loss does not have to be drastic to have a big impact. Losing 5 percent to 7 percent of a person's body weight can make a difference; for a 200-pound person, that is 10 to 14 pounds.

You can also learn how to start the conversation with your patients about nutrition with the help of a self-paced interactive online course called [Nutrition Science for Health and Longevity: What Every Physician Needs to Know](#). The course is offered from the Gaples Institute for Integrative Cardiology in partnership with the American Medical Association and covers key nutrition concepts and provides tools that can help with referrals to nutrition professionals.

Addressing your patients' diet and encouraging healthy lifestyle habits before, during and after pregnancy will help prevent and reduce chronic disease throughout your patients' lives