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# Assessment of Beta Cell Function by Estimating C-Peptide Levels Among Babies Born to Mothers with Gestational Diabetes

**Ajay Garje**

**Associate Professor, Pediatrics, SMBT Medical College & Hospital, Nandi Hills, Dhamangaon, Nashik, Maharashtra, India**

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**Corresponding author:** Dr. Ajay Garje
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**Abstract**

**Background**: Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) is a significant condition that affects pregnant women and increases the risk of metabolic disorders in offspring. One of the key factors in assessing fetal pancreatic function is measuring C-peptide levels, a marker for insulin secretion. Elevated C-peptide levels in neonates may indicate hyperinsulinemia resulting from maternal hyperglycemia during pregnancy. This study aims to assess beta cell function in babies born to mothers with gestational diabetes by measuring neonatal C-peptide levels.

**Methods**: A cross-sectional study was conducted with 100 newborns, born to mothers diagnosed with GDM. C-peptide levels were measured within 24 hours of birth using immunoassay techniques. Data such as birth weight, maternal age, and gestational age were also collected. The study aimed to evaluate the relationship between maternal GDM and neonatal C-peptide levels, with a particular focus on the association with birth weight and other perinatal factors.

**Results**: The mean C-peptide levels in newborns of mothers with GDM were significantly higher compared to those born to non-diabetic mothers ($p < 0.05$). A strong correlation was found between elevated C-peptide levels and increased birth weight, suggesting a link to fetal insulin overproduction as a response to maternal hyperglycemia.

**Conclusion**: Elevated C-peptide levels in neonates born to mothers with gestational diabetes suggest a compensatory beta-cell response to hyperglycemia. This could increase the risk for developing metabolic disorders in the future, warranting early monitoring and intervention for these infants.

**Keywords**: C-peptide, beta-cell function, gestational diabetes, neonates, insulin, hyperinsulinemia

## Introduction

Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) is a condition characterized by glucose intolerance that first manifests during pregnancy, typically diagnosed after the 24th week of gestation. It affects a significant percentage of pregnant women worldwide and is associated with numerous complications for both the mother and the offspring (1). Women with GDM are at an increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes later in life, and their offspring are at a higher risk of obesity, insulin resistance, and metabolic syndrome in adulthood (2). The mechanisms underlying these outcomes are not fully understood, but it is believed that the exposure to elevated maternal blood glucose levels during pregnancy influences fetal insulin production.

Insulin is crucial for fetal growth and metabolism, and its production in the fetus is primarily regulated by the pancreas, which secretes proinsulin. This proinsulin is cleaved into insulin and C-peptide, a byproduct that can be measured in the blood to evaluate insulin production (3). C-

peptide is an important marker because, unlike insulin, it is not affected by external sources of insulin, such as treatment or maternal insulin, making it an excellent indicator of endogenous insulin production (4).

Studies have shown that infants born to mothers with GDM tend to have elevated insulin production due to the hyperglycemic environment in utero, which stimulates fetal pancreatic beta cells (5). As a result, neonatal C-peptide levels serve as a valuable tool for assessing beta-cell function and the degree of fetal insulin secretion. Higher levels of C-peptide are often associated with macrosomia (excessive fetal growth) and increased risk of neonatal hypoglycemia, which can occur when the infant's insulin production remains elevated after birth, even as the maternal glucose supply is discontinued (6).

Understanding the relationship between maternal GDM and neonatal C-peptide levels is crucial for predicting future metabolic risks in these children. Elevated C-peptide levels in newborns may also have implications for long-term health outcomes, such as the early onset of insulin resistance or Type 2 diabetes in later childhood or adulthood (7). This study aims to explore the role of C-peptide as a biomarker for beta-cell function in infants born to mothers with GDM and to assess its association with perinatal factors such as birth weight.

## Aim and Objectives

**Aim**:

To assess beta cell function in neonates born to mothers with gestational diabetes by estimating their C-peptide levels.

**Objectives**:

1. To compare C-peptide levels in neonates born to mothers with GDM versus those born to non-diabetic mothers.
2. To analyze the relationship between neonatal C-peptide levels and birth weight, gestational age, and other perinatal factors.

## Materials and Methods

**Study Design**:

This was a prospective, observational study conducted at a tertiary care hospital. The study involved 100 neonates born to mothers diagnosed with gestational diabetes, as well as a control group of 100 neonates born to mothers without diabetes.

**Inclusion Criteria**:

- Neonates born to mothers diagnosed with GDM during pregnancy.
- Neonates born at term (37-42 weeks of gestation).
- Neonates without any major congenital abnormalities.

**Exclusion Criteria**:

- Neonates with a known history of neonatal diabetes or other endocrine disorders.
- Neonates with severe birth asphyxia or congenital malformations.
- Preterm infants (born before 37 weeks).

**Sample Collection and Analysis**:

Blood samples were collected from the umbilical cord of neonates within 24 hours of birth. Serum C-peptide levels were measured using a commercially available immunoassay kit. The C-peptide assay was performed according to the manufacturer's instructions, and the results were expressed in ng/mL. Additionally, maternal data, including age, body mass index (BMI), and gestational age, were recorded. Birth weight, Apgar score, and other relevant neonatal factors were also documented.

**Statistical Analysis**:

Data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 22). Descriptive statistics were calculated for demographic and clinical variables. The differences in C-peptide levels between the study and control groups were assessed using independent t-tests. The correlation between neonatal C-peptide levels and birth weight was determined using Pearson's correlation coefficient. A p-value of $< 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

## Results

**Table 1: Comparison of C-Peptide Levels Between Study and Control Groups**

| Group | Mean C-Peptide Level (ng/mL) | Standard Deviation | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Neonates of Mothers with GDM | 2.45 ± 0.73 | 0.73 | < 0.05 |
| Neonates of Non-Diabetic Mothers | 1.76 ± 0.56 | 0.56 | |

**Description**:

The mean C-peptide levels in neonates born to mothers with GDM were significantly higher than those in neonates born to non-diabetic mothers ($p < 0.05$), indicating increased endogenous insulin production in the GDM group.

**Table 2: Correlation Between C-Peptide Levels and Birth Weight**

| Birth Weight (kg) | C-Peptide Level (ng/mL) | p-value |
|---|---|---|
| < 2.5 | 1.95 ± 0.65 | 0.03 |
| 2.5 - 4.0 | 2.37 ± 0.58 | 0.02 |
| > 4.0 | 3.05 ± 0.80 | < 0.01 |

**Description**:

There was a positive correlation between C-peptide levels and birth weight. Neonates with higher birth weight had significantly elevated C-peptide levels, suggesting an increased insulin secretion response in utero.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that neonatal C-peptide levels are elevated in babies born to mothers with gestational diabetes. The higher levels of C-peptide observed in these infants suggest that fetal insulin production was enhanced in response to maternal hyperglycemia, a hallmark of GDM (8). Elevated insulin levels in utero contribute to fetal macrosomia, which was also evident in the correlation between birth weight and C-peptide levels observed in this study.

This hyperinsulinemia may persist after birth, leading to a higher risk of neonatal hypoglycemia, which is commonly seen in infants of diabetic mothers (9). The increased insulin levels in these infants are a result of fetal pancreatic beta-cell hypertrophy and hyperplasia, triggered by prolonged exposure to high glucose concentrations (10). The higher C-peptide levels in neonates with elevated birth weight further reinforce the link between fetal insulin production and macrosomia, as larger fetuses generally produce more insulin.

In contrast, neonates born to non-diabetic mothers had lower C-peptide levels, consistent with the expected response to normal maternal glucose concentrations. These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating elevated neonatal insulin levels in infants born to mothers with GDM and highlight the importance of assessing beta-cell function in this high-risk group (11,12).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study confirms that neonates born to mothers with gestational diabetes exhibit elevated C-peptide levels, indicating increased beta-cell activity and insulin production. These elevated C-peptide levels are strongly associated with higher birth weights and may predispose these infants to metabolic complications such as neonatal hypoglycemia. Early monitoring of neonatal glucose and insulin levels is essential in this population to prevent hypoglycemia and to provide appropriate management strategies. Furthermore, these findings suggest that neonatal C-peptide levels could serve as a useful biomarker for predicting future metabolic risks in children exposed to maternal diabetes during pregnancy.

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