

Weight management and pregnancy

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about being above a healthy weight range in pregnancy.

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. It is not intended as advice for your individual circumstances. Ask your health care provider for more information.

Weight management is an important health issue for women. There are extra risks for you and your baby during pregnancy, labour and birth if you are above a healthy weight.

What is BMI?

BMI stands for body mass index. BMI is a measure of the relationship between your height and your weight. It does not directly measure excess body fat. BMI can give a general guide to the risk of some health conditions that can be related to weight. Obesity is when your BMI is greater than or equal to 30 kg/m². To calculate your BMI, divide your weight in kilograms by your height in metres squared.

Classification	BMI (kg/m ²)
Underweight	Less than 18.5
Normal	18.5–24.9
Overweight	25–29.9
Obese I	30–34.9
Obese II	35–39.9
Obese III	Greater than or equal to 40

What problems might happen if your BMI is over 30?

Usually, the higher your BMI before pregnancy, the more likely problems are to occur. This includes problems such as high blood pressure (hypertension), diabetes, stillbirth, birth abnormalities, having a large or a small baby, excessive bleeding (haemorrhaging) after birth, and being more likely to develop a blood clot or an infection after birth. Your health care provider will discuss what problems might affect you and your baby as they depend on your general health and personal circumstances as well as your BMI.

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What does having a BMI over 30 mean for the care you receive?

More frequent visits and additional health checks may be recommended to help avoid problems for you and your baby. It is important you attend all your appointments so that you can receive the best care possible. You can expect to be offered referrals to other health care providers such as an obstetrician, anaesthetist and dietitian during your pregnancy. Extra ultrasound scans to monitor your baby's health may also be recommended. During labour, if your BMI is over 40 continuous checking of your baby's heart beat and a consultation with an anaesthetist is usually recommended.

Some maternity units don't have the right equipment or specialist staff to safely care for women who have a higher BMI. If this is the case at your local maternity unit, your health care provider will discuss options with you during your pregnancy. You may be advised to have your baby at another maternity unit that is able to safely care for you and your baby. Planning ahead is important so that you receive the safest care possible.

How much weight should you gain in pregnancy?

The recommended amount of weight to gain depends on what your BMI is at the start of your pregnancy. If your BMI is greater than 30 the recommended weight gain over your whole pregnancy is between 5 and 9 kilograms. Sometimes less weight gain is also acceptable. Gaining around 0.5 kilograms to 2 kilograms in the first trimester (the first 12 weeks of pregnancy) and on average, 200 grams per week during the remainder of the pregnancy is the recommended amount.

Pre-pregnancy BMI (kg/m ²)	Gain per week in trimester 2+3 (kg)	Total gain in pregnancy (kg)
Less than 18.5	0.45	12.5 to 18
18.5 to 24.9	0.45	11.5 to 16
25.0 to 29.9	0.28	7 to 11.5
Great than or equal to 30.0	0.22	5 to 9

Will you be weighed during your pregnancy?

Yes your weight will be monitored during your pregnancy. Gaining too much or not enough weight can affect how your baby grows and develops. It is important that you discuss your weight gain with your health care provider during your pregnancy.

Should you try to lose weight while you are pregnant?

You should not 'diet' or try to lose weight while you are pregnant. Not enough is known about how losing weight in pregnancy might affect your baby's growth and development. It is important to eat a healthy diet with a wide variety of foods from the five food groups (vegetables, fruit, cereals and grains, lean meats and alternatives, dairy) and to drink plenty of water. You should eat less processed foods, especially those that have too much saturated fat, added salt, and/or added sugars. Not drinking any alcohol is the safest option during all pregnancies. Talk to your health care provider or ask for a referral to a dietitian to learn more about healthy eating and meeting your nutritional needs for a healthy weight gain during pregnancy.

What is weight stigma?

Weight stigma is when someone treats you differently or values you less because of their attitude to your weight. Many women who have a higher BMI experience weight stigma during their lives. Being treated less respectfully because of your weight can make you feel uncomfortable or even depressed. If you are feeling like this, talk to a health care provider you feel comfortable with about it.

How much exercise or activity should you do during pregnancy?

Most health professionals agree that 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week is a reasonable goal to aim for. This does not have to be done all at once and can be broken up into 10 minute periods during the day. Moderate exercise is when you can talk without being short of breath while exercising. Many activities are safe during pregnancy including swimming walking, cycling on an exercise bike, yoga or Pilates, low-impact aerobics or light resistance gym work. Speak to your health care professional about what exercise is right for you.

What about breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding has many health benefits for you and your baby. It may also protect your baby from becoming overweight or obese. Women who have a BMI over

30 may have difficulty establishing and maintaining breastfeeding and this can be due to many reasons. Your midwife will assist you with breastfeeding. You can also ask your health care provider about assistance from a breastfeeding specialist (a lactation consultant) while you are pregnant, after your baby is born or after you go home. Weight loss of about 0.5 kilogram per week for mothers after birth does not affect the quality or amount of your breast milk. Talk to your health care provider or ask for a referral to a dietitian to learn more about healthy eating and to balance your needs for breastfeeding and weight loss.

Why is it important to lose weight after your baby is born?

Even small amounts of weight loss between pregnancies can be good for you and your next baby. Returning to your pre-pregnancy weight (or lower if you were above the healthy weight range) will reduce your chances of developing complications in your next pregnancy as well as later in life.



Figure1: Healthy food choices

Support and information

13HEALTH (13 432584) is a phone line that provides health information, referral and services to the public.

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline 1800 882 436 (free call) offers free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline

Lifeline 13 11 14 Lifeline offers a telephone crisis support service to anyone. www.lifeline.org.au

Pregnancy weight tracker download free: www.health.qld.gov.au/nutrition/resources/antenatal_wtoverwt.pdf

Australian dietary guidelines: www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/n55

Online BMI calculator: www.health.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/your-bmi