

HEALTHY WEIGHT IN PREGNANCY



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EASTERN HEALTH MATERNITY SERVICE

Information for pregnant women

Pregnancy is a time when many women are motivated to make lifestyle changes that will improve health for both themselves and for their families. During pregnancy, it is normal for you to gain weight as your baby grows and your body adapts.

Weight is sometimes a sensitive issue for women in pregnancy as body shape changes affect women in different ways.

This information sheet has been developed to help you and your family to achieve and maintain a healthy weight before, during and after pregnancy by eating healthily and being physically active.

What is healthy weight in pregnancy?

Healthy weight in pregnancy is determined by your body mass index (BMI) at the onset of pregnancy. BMI is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms (kg) by height in metres squared (m^2).

Assessing BMI is currently the best measure available to provide a guide to your risk of developing health problems, although BMI doesn't take into account other factors such as your age, gender, ethnicity or general health.

If you are planning to have a baby and have concerns regarding your BMI, please speak to your local doctor for advice.

Category	BMI range (kg/m^2)	Risk of developing health problems
Underweight	<18.5	Increased
Healthy weight	18.5- 24.9	Least
Overweight	25-29.9	Increased
Obese	Above 30	Highest

How much weight should you gain in pregnancy?

The amount and pattern of weight gain in pregnancy varies for each woman and each subsequent pregnancy.

Being either above or below 'healthy weight' before pregnancy will influence the amount of weight gain that is recommended for you to gain during pregnancy.

The table overleaf is a general guide to the amount of weight you are recommended to gain as pregnancy progresses.

Gestation	Pre-pregnancy BMI			
	Under 18.5	18.5-24.9	25-29.9	Above 30
Before 12 weeks pregnant	1 - 3 kg	1 - 3 kg	0 -1 kg	0 – 1kg
12-24 weeks pregnant	5 – 7 kg	5 – 6 kg	3 – 5 kg	2 – 4 kg
After 24 weeks pregnant	6 – 8 kg	5 – 6 kg	4 – 5 kg	3 – 4 kg
Total weight gain	12 – 18 kg	11 – 16 kg	7 – 11 kg	5 – 9 kg

Risks associated with being above or below healthy weight in pregnancy

Having a BMI **below** the ‘healthy’ BMI category can increase your risk of having a baby too early (premature) or a baby with low birth weight.

Having a BMI **above** the ‘healthy’ BMI category, or gaining too much weight in pregnancy can increase your risk of developing high blood pressure, pre-eclampsia, obstructive sleep apnoea, or diabetes in pregnancy.

The baby also can have a higher risk of having a birth weight in either the ‘high’ or ‘low’ birth weight category, and it is more difficult to monitor the baby’s growth and wellbeing with ultra-sound scanning while you are pregnant, and to monitor the baby’s heart rate when you are in labour.

There is also an increased risk of needing an induction of labour or a caesarean birth, and there is a higher rate of unexplained stillbirth when women have a BMI in the above ‘healthy’ BMI category, particularly if there is ‘excessive’ weight gain in pregnancy.

Managing weight during pregnancy

Although strict dieting is not recommended in pregnancy, ‘eating for two’ is not recommended either. Eating a healthy, well balanced diet is a lifestyle choice that can improve health of both yourself and your growing family well into the future. If you are unsure what a ‘healthy diet’ for your family is, you can seek assistance from any of the following resources:

- Family doctor/ GP
- Maternal and Child Health Nurse
- Dietician
- Community Health Clinic

The following advice is intended to support you to maintain a healthy diet and exercise routine during your pregnancy, to optimize the health of yourself and your baby. If you feel that you would like a referral to a dietician in pregnancy, please speak to your midwife or doctor at your antenatal visit.

Diet

Your need for energy from food does not change in the first 6 months of pregnancy and increases only slightly in the last 3 months (and then only by around 200 calories per day).

You will be more likely to achieve and maintain a healthy weight before, during and after pregnancy if you:

- Base meals on starchy foods such as potatoes, bread, rice and pasta, choosing wholegrain where possible.
- Eat fibre-rich foods such as oats, beans, peas, lentils, grains, seeds, fruit and vegetables, as well as wholegrain bread and brown rice and pasta.
- Eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day, in place of foods higher in fat and calories.
- Eat a low-fat diet and avoid increasing your fat and/or calorie intake.
- Eat as little as possible of fried food; drinks and confectionery high in added sugars (such as cakes, pastries and soft drinks); and other food high in fat and sugar (such as some take-away and fast foods).
- Eat breakfast.
- Watch the portion size of meals and snacks, and how often you are eating.

Exercise

- Recreational exercise such as swimming or brisk walking and strength conditioning exercise is both safe and beneficial in pregnancy, for both physical and mental wellbeing.
- The aim of recreational exercise in pregnancy is to stay fit, rather than to reach peak fitness.
- If women have not exercised routinely before pregnancy, they should begin with no more than 15 minutes of continuous exercise, three times per week, increasing gradually to daily 30-minute sessions¹.
- If women exercised regularly before pregnancy, they should be able to continue with no adverse effects.
- Make activities such as walking, cycling, swimming, aerobics and gardening part of everyday life and build activity into daily life – for example, by taking the stairs instead of the lift or taking a walk at lunchtime.
- Minimise sedentary activities, such as sitting for long periods watching television, at a computer or playing video games.
- Walk, cycle or use another mode of transport involving physical activity.

‘Mums in Training’ exercise classes are available through the Eastern Health Physiotherapy Department – ask your midwife or doctor for a fact sheet.

¹ ‘Obesity’ NICE clinical guideline 43 recommends adults should be encouraged to do at least 30 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity on 5 or more days a week. The activity can be in one session or several lasting 10 minutes or more.

Updated August 2014. This document has been developed having regard to general circumstances, in light of information available to the authors at the time of preparation. Please discuss your options with your midwife or doctor in relation to your own personal circumstances. If this is a hard copy it may not be the latest version of this document.

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