

Managing your weight in pregnancy



If your BMI was over 25 before you became pregnant you should try to limit the amount of extra weight you put on during pregnancy. While crash dieting during pregnancy is not recommended, as it may be harmful to your baby, sensible eating and maintaining good levels of activity will help minimise excessive weight gain during pregnancy.

Managing your weight is not about dieting or trying to lose weight. It's about looking after yourself and your baby by eating healthily and keeping active. This can help you feel better and limit the extra pounds you might otherwise put on, which you may struggle to lose after your baby is born.

BMI and pregnancy

Your Body Mass Index (BMI) is a calculation that health professionals use to work out whether you are a healthy weight for your height (weight (kg)/ height (m²)). This will be taken at your initial visit with the midwife to identify your BMI.

- Less than 18.5 is considered underweight
- 18.5 to 24.9 is considered healthy
- 25 to 29.9 is considered 'overweight'
- Over 30 is considered 'obese'

The BMI calculation is for use before and after pregnancy, although your midwife may measure you to calculate a BMI at your first appointment. Your BMI before you became pregnant may highlight the need for some additional care or support during your pregnancy.

How much weight should I put on in pregnancy?

You will gain some weight when you're pregnant, especially at the end of pregnancy. This weight includes your baby, the placenta, the extra fluid in your bloodstream, the water around your baby, your growing breasts and some extra fat stores to protect your baby. All these changes are important for the health of your baby and the pregnancy. In America, guidelines suggest that women who are heavier at the start of their pregnancies (or who have a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or above) should not put on more than nine kg, which is 1 stone and 6 lbs (as recommended by the Institute of Medicine).

Putting on too much weight isn't good for you or your baby though, and you may be at risk of developing diabetes in pregnancy which has added complications. Plus the extra kilos may be harder to shed after giving birth.

Managing your weight doesn't mean dieting or trying to lose weight. This is definitely not the time for a weight-loss diet! Managing your weight by eating well and keeping active can help you to achieve a healthier pregnancy, a safer birth and a healthier baby.

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Why do I need to manage my weight when I'm pregnant?

If you are a larger pregnant woman, being careful about your weight might help you to:

- have a more comfortable and enjoyable pregnancy, enabling you to be more mobile and less likely to suffer skin problems and pelvic pain.
- reduce the risk of pregnancy complications which can be serious. These include miscarriage and birth defects; gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia; complications in labour, including the need for a Caesarean delivery; stillbirth and short and long term health problems for the baby.
- have less weight to lose after you have had your baby, and also mean your baby is less likely to develop obesity during his/her life

Weight management top tips

Choose food that will keep you satisfied for longer

As well as having regular meals it is important to choose foods that release their energy slowly rather than converting quickly to sugar.

There are lots of foods that you can include in your meals that release their energy slowly, these include:

- multigrain or granary bread and toast
- rice that is NOT easy cook – basmati rice is the best
- potatoes – new, boiled, baked (eat the skin!), or sweet potato.
- Wholemeal pasta

Ease up on the fruit juice

Women often think that fruit juice is the healthiest drink option in pregnancy, however you should aim to have no more than one glass a day. Fruit juice can be high in natural sugar, which can make your blood sugar levels rise and fall again rapidly. Choose fresh juice with pulp where possible and avoid those with added sugar or 'made from concentrate'.

Start right with breakfast

Many people skip breakfast because they think they don't have time for it but studies have shown that women who have breakfast are more likely to be able to control their weight than those who don't. Our bodies have been fasting while we are asleep, and if we don't eat in the morning we will feel tired and hungry and are more likely to overeat later. If you're not used to having breakfast, here are some ideas to try:

- porridge (not instant) with a chopped banana
- sugar free cereals such as Shredded Wheat or sugar-free muesli with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk (add some chopped or dried fruit to give some natural sweetness)
- low-fat spread or low-sugar jam on granary toast
- fresh fruit salad with a low-fat yoghurt
- cereal bar made from wholegrains
- poached egg* on multigrain or wholegrain toast

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* You should only eat eggs cooked enough for both the white and the yolk to be solid to ensure that you are not at risk of salmonella, which could make you very ill.

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