

*For Your Information
From Premier Perinatal*

Obesity and Pregnancy

What Is Obesity? Obesity is defined as having a BMI over 30. BMI is the body mass index which is a number calculated from height and weight, and is used to determine whether you are underweight, normal weight, overweight or obese. You can use an online BMI calculator to find out your BMI (www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi)

What are the increased risks during pregnancy for my baby if I am obese?

Being obese during pregnancy increases the risk of the following problems for your baby:

Birth defects - Babies born to obese mothers have an increased risk of having birth defects.

Problems with tests – If you have too much body fat, it can make it more difficult to see certain problems with the baby’s anatomy on an ultrasound exam.

Macrosomia – In this condition, the baby is larger than normal. This can increase the risk of the baby being injured during birth. Macrosomia also increases the risk of cesarean delivery.

Preterm birth – Problems associated with a mother’s obesity may mean that the baby will need to be delivered early. Preterm infants have an increased risk of health problems, including breathing problems, eating problems and developmental and learning difficulties later in life.

Stillbirth – The risk of stillbirth increases the higher the mother’s BMI.

What are the increased risks during pregnancy for me if I am obese?

Obesity during pregnancy puts you at risk of serious health problems.

High Blood Pressure: High blood pressure that starts during the second half of pregnancy is called gestational hypertension. It can lead to serious complications.

Preeclampsia – Preeclampsia is a serious illness for both a woman and her baby. The kidneys and liver may fail. In rare cases, stroke can occur. In severe cases, the woman, baby or both may die.

Gestational Diabetes – High blood glucose (sugar) levels during pregnancy increase the risk of having a very large baby, and a cesarean delivery. Women who have had gestational diabetes have a higher risk of having diabetes in the future, as do their children.

Can I still have a safe pregnancy if I am obese?

Despite the risks, you can have a safe pregnancy and healthy baby if you are obese. You will need to work with your healthcare provider to monitor your weight, exercise regularly, get regular prenatal care, and take steps to be as healthy as you can during your pregnancy,

How much weight should I gain during pregnancy?

You will discuss how much weight you should gain with your health care provider at your first prenatal visit. The following weight guidelines show the weight gain ranges that are associated with the best possible outcomes for both pregnant women and their babies.

<i>Weight before pregnancy</i>	<i>BMI</i>	<i>Total Weight Gain Range (pounds)</i>
Normal weight	18.5 – 24.9	23 – 35
Overweight	25 – 29.9	15 - 25
Obese	30 or greater	11 - 20

Modified from Institute of Medicine (US). Weight gain during pregnancy: reexamining the guidelines. Washington DC. National Academies Press; 2009.

250 Route 37 West * Second Floor* Toms River* NJ * 08755

732-736-0300

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Should I try to lose weight during pregnancy?

Even for obese women, pregnancy is not the time to actively try to lose weight. However, if you are obese and are gaining less than what the guidelines suggest, and your baby is growing well, gaining less than the recommended guidelines can have benefits, such as decreased risks of needing a cesarean delivery and of having a very large baby.

Will I be tested for gestational diabetes during pregnancy?

Because overweight and obese women have a higher risk of this complication than women who are a normal weight, your health care provider may test you for gestational diabetes during the first 3 months of your pregnancy. You also may be given the test again in the later months of your pregnancy.

If I have never exercised, how should I begin during pregnancy?

Begin with as little as 5 minutes of exercise a day and add 5 minutes to each week. Your goal is to stay active for 30 minutes each day. Walking is a good choice if you are new to exercise. Brisk walking gives a total body workout and is easy on the joints. Swimming is another good exercise for pregnant women.

Can I have a vaginal delivery if I am obese?

Vaginal delivery is the ideal way to have your baby. However, a vaginal delivery is not always possible, and being obese can make a vaginal delivery even less likely. It can be harder to monitor the baby during labor. If the baby is very large, difficulties during labor and delivery may arise. For these reasons, obesity during pregnancy increases the risk of having a cesarean delivery.

Is cesarean delivery riskier for obese women?

Cesarean delivery is riskier for obese women than for women of normal weight. In general, the time it takes to perform the operation may be longer. The longer the operation takes, the greater the risks of bleeding and other complications. Additional risks of cesarean delivery include the following:

- Infections
- Problems with anesthesia
- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)
- Poor wound healing

What do I need to do after pregnancy?

Follow up with your doctor regarding further testing for diabetes, especially if you have gestational diabetes during pregnancy.

Consider losing excess weight before getting pregnant again. You can safely lose weight after pregnancy.

Continue your healthy eating and exercise habits. Not only is breastfeeding the best way to feed your baby, it also may help with postpartum weight loss. Overall, women who breastfeed their babies for at least a few months tend to lose pregnancy weight more quickly than women who do not breastfeed.

Most people who have lost weight and kept it off get 60-90 minutes of moderate intensity activity on most days of the week. Moderate intensity activities include biking, brisk walking and yard work.

From American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, online Patient Education FAQs. www.acog.org/patients/FAQ

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