

Planning your pregnancies: the risks of being overweight



Many women know that being overweight or obese increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. New research shows that overweight and obesity also pose risks for pregnant women and their babies.

Women who enter pregnancy overweight or obese are at higher risk for:

- Gestational diabetes
- Pregnancy related high blood pressure
- Premature delivery
- Cesarean delivery
- Late fetal death or infant death shortly after delivery

Infants who are born to women who were overweight or obese are at a higher risk for seven birth defects, including spina bifida. Children born to overweight mothers often struggle with obesity as well.

I am a woman of childbearing age.

What can I do?

- If you don't know your healthy weight range, talk with your doctor or use a BMI calculator (see table).
- Maintain a healthy weight, whether you are pregnant or not.
- Learn more about the risks of being overweight and discuss these with friends to teach and support each other.
- Take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid daily even if you are not planning on getting pregnant soon. To prevent birth defects, the folic acid must be taken before pregnancy and very early in pregnancy.
- Make good food decisions, exercise, and be a good role model for your family. For some ideas, visit www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/nutrition/index.htm.
- Meet with a doctor about your health when planning a pregnancy.



How much weight is too much?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a number calculated from weight and height. The table below shows BMI values for a person who is 5' 4". Studies found that women with a BMI of 29 and higher were at an increased risk for poor pregnancy and birth outcomes, and risk increased as BMI increased.

Weight categories	BMI value	Weight ranges for a 5'4" individual
Normal	18.5 - 24.9	108 - 144
Overweight	25 - 29.9	145 - 173
Obese	30 - 39.9	174 - 231
Extremely obese	40+	232+

To find your BMI, visit www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/

I am pregnant now. What can I do?

- Follow your doctor's advice about prenatal care and your health.
- When you're hungry, eat healthy foods. Information about nutrition during pregnancy can be found at [Nutrition During Pregnancy](#).
- Be active. Get exercise even if it's just going for walks or other low-impact exercise. You can find information about exercising during pregnancy at [Exercise During Pregnancy](#).
- Pregnancy is a critical time for women and weight. Be careful to make sure your pregnancy doesn't create or worsen weight issues for you.
- After you have your baby, focus on losing the weight you gained within 6-12 months of having the baby.
- Plan to breastfeed your infant. Breastfeeding can counter some risks to your infant by improving the immune system and reducing the risk of SIDS. Unfortunately, women who are overweight are less likely to breastfeed. Learn all you can about breastfeeding and talk to moms who have had successful experiences.

