

What You Should Know About Your Weight During Pregnancy

Pregnant women often say, "I'm eating for 2 now." This does not mean you should eat twice as much, since your baby is born at only a fraction of your weight. It does mean that what you eat during pregnancy directly affects your health and that of your child. The best things you can do during pregnancy are to maintain a healthy diet and get enough exercise. This will give you an easier delivery and more energy after your baby is born.

How much weight should I gain during pregnancy?

Experts suggest that a woman of average weight can safely gain 25 to 35 pounds during pregnancy. If she is underweight, a 28- to 40-pound weight gain is considered acceptable. A woman who is overweight should gain 15 to 25 pounds; an obese woman should gain 11 to 20 pounds. The main thing is to have a consistent weight gain so that your baby will get the nutrients needed to grow. The number of calories you need to consume depends on the number of calories you burn off in a day's activity.

What if I am already overweight when I become pregnant?

Women who are overweight or obese have greater risks for complications in pregnancy, including high blood pressure, gestational diabetes, and cesarean delivery. Also, children of obese women are more likely to be large at birth, be overweight in childhood, have heart defects, and develop diabetes. Discuss with your clinician any health risks you may have because of your weight, and take steps to lower those risks.

Should I go on a diet during pregnancy?

Pregnancy is not the time to go on a weight-loss diet, but it is the time to focus on eating a variety of foods with nutritional value. Eating just 100 to 300 extra calories a day from fruits, vegetables, and whole grains will help your baby receive what he or she needs for a strong body. These good eating habits can be a start to a healthier lifestyle for the whole family.

As you choose nutrient-rich foods, try to eliminate foods with high fat content such as sweets and fried foods. You need 4 servings of milk products a day, but avoid whole milk and use low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Limit your intake of sweetened soft drinks, and choose water instead.

Your clinician will probably prescribe for you a daily prenatal vitamin and mineral supplement; this is not a substi-



tute for eating well. It is best when you combine it with your healthy diet.

Should I exercise while I am pregnant?

If you already exercise, in most cases you can continue what you have been doing. If you have not been active, now is the time to begin a habit of moderate exercise such as walking or swimming. Being active for at least 30 minutes a day helps reduce backache, constipation, and swelling, and it may prevent gestational diabetes. It will give you more energy, improve your mood, and help you sleep better. Regular activity will strengthen you to cope with labor, and it will help you get in shape sooner after the baby is born.

How do I get started for my healthy pregnancy?

Make a plan. Start by charting your daily food intake and exercise. Write down everything you eat, and see what you need to add for nutrition or eliminate for better health. Track your daily exercising, with a goal of at least 30 minutes of activity every day. Involve your family or friends to make the time more enjoyable.