

Weight Gain During Pregnancy

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Normal Weight Gain

It is normal and healthy to gain weight during pregnancy. However, pregnancy weight gain can be a source of confusion and stress for many women. The numbers on the scale are less important than eating healthy, nutritious foods and exercising regularly.

Weight gain goals for pregnant women were updated in 2009 to address two main concerns. First, healthy weight gain during pregnancy leads to healthier babies and better birth outcomes. Second, gaining too much weight can lead to weight retention after the birth and this is a major contributor to obesity in women. (Varney, 2013).

Instead of a single, standard weight gain goal for all pregnant women, it is now recommended to adjust the weight gain goal based on the mother's pre-pregnancy BMI (body mass index). Women who weigh less before pregnancy will have a higher recommended weight gain during pregnancy. Women who weigh more before pregnancy will have a lower recommended weight gain during pregnancy.



To calculate your recommended weight gain during pregnancy, the first step is to calculate your BMI. There are many BMI calculators available online and they are very easy to use. (http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm) Begin by recording your pre-pregnancy weight in pounds. Divide your weight (in pounds) by your height (in inches) squared. Multiply this number by 703 and the result is your BMI.

For example:

Weight = 150 lbs, Height = 5'5" (65")

Calculation: $[150 \div (65)^2] \times 703 = 24.96$

This person has a BMI of 24.96.

Once you have calculated your pre-pregnancy BMI, look at the following table. This table lists the recommended weight gain for each BMI category. Remember, weight gain is healthy and normal during pregnancy, even if you were overweight before pregnancy.

Recommended Weight Gain in Pregnancy for Singleton Pregnancy

Pre-pregnancy Weight Status	BMI	Recommended Weight Gain (in pounds)
Underweight	Below 18.5	28 - 40
Normal Weight	18.5 - 24.9	25 - 35
Overweight	25.0 - 29.9	15 - 25
Obese	30 and Above	11 - 20

(Varney, 2013. Adapted from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK32815/>)

The weight gain recommendations for pregnancy are designed to give pregnant women a healthy goal based on individual needs. Women who are underweight before pregnancy need to gain more weight to reduce the risk of preterm birth. Women who gain an excessive amount of weight during pregnancy are at risk of complications, including gestational diabetes, birth complications, and difficulty losing weight after giving birth (Varney, 2013).

Distribution of Weight Gain

Weight gained during pregnancy is distributed throughout the mother's body. In addition to the weight of the growing baby, the weight of the uterus increases as it enlarges. Fluid makes up a significant amount of pregnancy weight gain in the form of increased fluid levels in the mother's body, amniotic fluid in the uterus, and increased blood volume in the mother. The combined weight of these fluids is about 7-9 pounds. The placenta weighs about 1.5 pounds. The mother's fat stores increase during pregnancy and add an additional 6-8 pounds of weight gain. Breast enlargement adds about 1-3 pounds of weight gain during pregnancy. Overall, the average weight of the full-term baby is about 7-8 pounds, between 1/4 to 1/3 of the total amount of weight gained during a normal pregnancy.



Disposition of Weight Gain in Pregnancy

Compartment	Amount of Weight Gain (in pounds)
Fetus	7-8
Fat stores	6-8
Increased blood volume	3-4
Increased fluid volume	2-3
Amniotic fluid	2
Breast enlargement	1-3
Uterine enlargement	2
Placenta	1.5
TOTAL	25-35

(Varney, 2013. Adapted from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK32815/>)

Remember, these numbers are averages for full-term, single babies and healthy mothers.

Losing the "Baby Weight"

Healthy weight gained during pregnancy from eating nutritious foods is typically lost during the postpartum period. Excessive weight gain or weight gained through eating "junk" foods may be more difficult to lose. Weight retained after birth is a risk factor for obesity.

There is an immediate weight loss after the birth of the baby and delivery of the placenta. Some of this weight loss may be offset by an increase in fluids as your breastmilk comes in a few days after birth.

During the immediate postpartum period, your body will work to remove the extra fluid retained during pregnancy. Many women notice an increase in urinating and sweating after birth.

Women lose pregnancy weight at different rates. Much of this appears to be determined by factors that influence weight loss outside of pregnancy (Varney, 2013).

Factors that influence postpartum weight loss include:

- Existing weight (BMI)
- Diet
- Age
- Activity level

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2015). About adult BMI. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/adult_bmi/index.html

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Varney, H., King, T.L., Brucker, M.C., Kriebs, J.M. Fahey, J.O. & Geger, C.L. (2015). *Varney's midwifery*, (5th ed.). Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Publishers.