

HEALTHY EATING, EXERCISE AND WEIGHT GAIN

BEFORE AND DURING PREGNANCY



THE SOCIETY OF
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A balanced diet, regular exercise and healthy body weight promote good health, lower your risk of disease and have positive effects on your pregnancy.

How do I prepare for pregnancy?

Women with healthy eating and exercise patterns before pregnancy enjoy reduced health risks for both themselves and their babies during pregnancy. By following a balanced diet and participating in regular exercise, you should work towards maintaining a Body Mass Index (BMI) below 30, and ideally between 20 and 25. Women who have BMIs over 30 when they conceive are at increased risk for complications during pregnancy.

Eating a balanced diet before you become pregnant will help your body meet the nutritional needs of your developing baby when you become pregnant. Follow *Canada's Food Guide* — this promotes eating a variety of healthy foods and has tips and advice for women at all stages of life.

As well, scientific evidence shows that women who are physically fit before pregnancy have fewer aches and pains and feel they have more energy during their pregnancies. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise (that makes you sweat), five days a week, to enjoy long-term good health. This will also prepare you for the physical challenges of pregnancy and labour, and help you maintain or achieve a healthy BMI for pregnancy.



I'm already pregnant: is it too late?

It's never too late to start improving your diet, and many pregnant women can begin participating in light exercise. Speak with your health-care professional before making any changes to your routine.

What is BMI?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is used to estimate a healthy weight range for a person over 18, based on his or her height. Keep in mind that this measurement does not take into account factors such as genetics and bone structure, which will also influence a person's weight. If you have concerns about your weight, speak to your health-care professional.

To calculate your BMI and to see ranges for your optimal BMI, visit the Health Canada resource at the end of this pamphlet and search for 'BMI.' Or, you can use this formula: $BMI = \text{weight(kg)}/\text{height(m)}^2$.

Example: You are 160 cm tall and weigh 65 kg.

$$BMI = \frac{65}{1.60^2} = \frac{65}{2.56} = 25.4$$

How much weight should I gain during pregnancy?

Weight gain during pregnancy supports the growth of your baby and the placenta, as well as changes in your body (such as an increased volume of blood and fluid, larger breast size, and some storage of fat). Evidence shows that women who gain the recommended amount of weight during pregnancy have fewer complications, such as caesarean section, gestational hypertension, and low or high birth weight.

The following guidelines may be useful for you, but keep in mind that weight gain will be different for everybody. Speak with your health-care professional if you are concerned that you are gaining too much or too little weight.

BMI before pregnancy	Recommended weight gain
Less than 18.5	12.5 to 18 kg (28 to 40 lb)
Between 18.5 and 24.9	11.5 to 16 kg (25 to 35 lb)
Between 25 and 29.9	7 to 11.5 kg (15 to 25 lb)
More than 30	At least 7 kg (15 lb)
Twin pregnancies.....	16 to 20.5 kg (35 to 45 lb)

Obesity in pregnancy: what are the risks?

Having excess weight before pregnancy, particularly a BMI over 30, can increase your risk of serious health problems and is linked with many complications in pregnancy that affect both you and your baby.

Risks for you

- Gestational diabetes
- Gestational hypertension
- Caesarean section (as well as increased risks for complications)
- Increased risk of excess blood loss
- Early labour and birth
- Miscarriage
- Infertility

Risks for your baby

- Baby growing too big (causing problems during birth for mother and baby)
- Difficulty monitoring fetal heart rate
- Needing to stay in hospital after birth
- Birth defects, including neural tube defects
- Stillbirth

Meeting your energy needs during pregnancy

What's more important than how much weight you gain during pregnancy? *What you eat and how often you eat.*

Pregnant women should eat small amounts of food often and avoid long periods without eating — ideally, three meals and three snacks spread throughout the day.

You may not need to increase your caloric intake during the first trimester, but should eat to satisfy your appetite. During your second and third trimesters your energy needs will increase, even if you feel less hungry because your growing baby is putting pressure on your stomach. For most pregnant women, this means eating an extra two or three servings per day from any of the food groups in *Canada's Food Guide*.

For more information on healthy eating during pregnancy, including which foods you should limit or avoid and which nutrients you may need more of, consult the resources at the end of this pamphlet. If you have special nutritional needs, or nausea and vomiting which prevent you from getting the food you need, get support from your health-care professional, who may refer you to a dietitian.

How do I stay active during pregnancy?

If you were active for at least six months before your pregnancy, ask your health-care professional about whether you may continue your sports or workouts safely. As you move further into your pregnancy and your body changes, you may feel mild aches and pains due to looser joints and shifting of your body weight. You may need to revise your exercise program every trimester to reduce the risk of falls and limit high-impact activities.

If you have not been active before your pregnancy, start low and go slow. Try regular brisk walking, swimming, strength training for pregnant women, or other activities that will strengthen your heart and lungs and tone your muscles. It is recommended that you wait until the second trimester to start your program.



For more information on healthy eating, exercise and weight gain during pregnancy

- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada's book "Healthy Beginnings: Giving your baby the best start from preconception to birth": www.sogc.org/healthybeginnings
- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada's guideline "Obesity in pregnancy": www.sogc.org/guidelines
- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada's brochure "Folic acid: For preconception and pregnancy": www.sogc.org/health/pamphlets_e.asp
- Information from Health Canada on BMI and "Canada's Food Guide": www.hc-sc.gc.ca