

Maternal Weight Gain During Pregnancy

By Lauren Hirschfeld, MS, RD, LDN

Many people believe that pregnancy allows a woman to "eat for two" with no concerns in regard to weight gain. However, nutrition experts say this is not exactly true. It is true that weight gain is important during pregnancy within limits. Extra calories provide nourishment to your developing baby, and is also stored for breastfeeding your baby after delivery. On the other hand, excessive weight gain brings with it a variety of complicated risks such as:

- Stillbirth
- Preeclampsia (an abnormal state of pregnancy characterized by hypertension and fluid retention)
- Glucose intolerance
- Cesarean delivery
- Macrosomia (having a large baby for the gestational period)
- Varicose veins
- Difficulty breastfeeding at 10 weeks postpartum
- Postpartum weight retention

Unfortunately, it is not as simple as avoiding weight gain. There are risks associated with not gaining enough weight as well, including: low birth weight or very low birth weight baby, preterm birth and neural tube defects.

How Do You Know How Much Weight Is Enough To Gain?

1. Find your pre-pregnancy Body Mass Index (BMI). Your BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. To calculate your BMI, use the following link:
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/>

Or you can use the following equation:

$$\frac{\text{Weight in kilograms}}{(\text{Height in meters})^2}$$

2. After you know your BMI, you can classify your pre-pregnancy weight based on the classifications made by the Institute of Medicine (IOM):



3. Body Mass Index

Underweight	<19.8
Normal	19.8-26.0
Overweight	>26.0-29.0
Obese	>29.0

4. Once you know what classification you fall under, you can see how much weight you should try to gain based on the Institute of Medicine recommendations:

Recommended Total Weight Gain		
Underweight (BMI >19.8)	28-40 lb	12.5-18 kg
Normal (BMI 19.8-26.0)	25-35 lb	11.5-16 kg
Overweight (>26.0-29.0)	15-25 lb	7-11.5 kg
Obese (>29.0)	at least 15 lb	at least 6.8 kg

At What Rate Should You Gain During Your Pregnancy?

This depends on your weight before you were pregnant. If you were normal weight before pregnancy:

- 3-5 pounds during the first trimester
- 1-2 pounds/week in 2nd trimester
- 1-2 pounds/week in 3rd trimester

Underweight Before Pregnancy:

- 5-6 pounds or more in first trimester, depending on your health care provider's recommendations
- 1-2 pounds/week in 2nd and 3rd trimesters

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Overweight Before Pregnancy:

- 1-2 pounds during the 1st trimester
- 1-2 pounds/week during the last 6 months of pregnancy

For most women who began pregnancy at a normal weight, adding about 300 extra calories a day to your diet will help you reach your goal. Some ideas of how to add 300 calories into your diet are:

- 1 small banana with 2 Tablespoons peanut butter
- Half-cup trail mix with nuts, seeds and dried fruit
- 12 almonds with 6 oz yogurt and 1 small orange
- 1/3 cup hummus with 5 whole wheat crackers and carrot sticks
- 1 cup low fat milk and 4 fig bars

Some women need more or fewer calories, depending on their individual metabolism and activity level. Gradual weight gain is ideal. There is no need to worry if you do not hit the targets mentioned above exactly. The important thing is to pay attention to your overall weight gain, and to treat your body in a healthy way. For more information on a healthy pregnancy read [The ABC's of Growing a Healthy Baby.](#)

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