

Why Pregnant Women Shouldn't Gain Too Much or Too Little Weight

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A new study finds that women who gain too much or too little weight during pregnancy are at increased risk of having an overweight or obese child.

Some women gain a lot of weight during their pregnancy, while others simply don't gain enough. Now, a new study finds that gaining too much or too little weight during pregnancy may increase the risk of having an overweight or obese child. What's more, gestational weight gain had a greater impact on childhood overweight/obesity among normal-weight women, suggesting that the effect may be independent of genetic predictors of obesity.

The study, conducted by Kaiser Permanente, was published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*. It is one of the largest studies to look at the 2009 Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommendations regarding pregnancy weight gain in relation to childhood obesity, according to Kaiser.

Everything in Moderation

Commenting on the study, **nutritionist Franci Cohen**, M.S., told Healthline, "Americans tend to flock toward extreme behavior, such as binge eating or starving, over exercising, or skipping it entirely. Finding a middle ground, and adopting moderate behavior with all aspects of lifestyle, has become increasingly challenging, making Americans more susceptible and vulnerable to develop illnesses."

Emphasizing that many pregnant women try to watch their weight, while others think the term pregnancy is synonymous with what she termed, "food fest," Cohen said, "This can reap havoc on an unborn baby. Whether you eat too little or too much, your body's homeostatic mechanisms will kick in and make sure your baby draws the needed vitamins and minerals for growth from you. But, by forcing the body to undergo these regulatory processes, you are inevitably setting the stage for a faulty metabolism and damaging your baby's ability, as a child and adult later on in life, to maintain energy balance in the body, and to properly control hunger and satiety, which are all integral factors in obesity."

Pointing out that moderation is important, Cohen said, "BMI's, pre-pregnancy body weight, progressive amount of weight gain throughout the pregnancy, healthy diet, and being active, are all variables to take into consideration before, during, and after pregnancy. "This will ensure both mommy and baby are healthy and fit," said Cohen.

Also weighing in on the study results, Alissa Rumsey, RD, CDN, CNSC, CSCS, a registered dietitian and spokesperson for the New York State Dietetic Association, told Healthline that the results of this study reinforce the negative effects of gaining more than the recommended weight during pregnancy, even in women with normal pre-pregnancy BMIs.

“While we can't say with statistical significance that women gaining below the IOM weight recommendations have a greater chance of an overweight or obese child, gaining too little weight has been shown to have other deleterious effects, such as pre-term and/or low birthweight babies who are at greater risk for neurodevelopmental and lower respiratory tract conditions than normal weight infants.”

Rumsey suggests healthcare providers give pregnant women weight gain goals specific to their individual BMI in order to improve the likelihood of healthy outcomes for both mothers and babies. “Pregnant women can help to ensure a healthy infant by eating an appropriate amount of healthy foods, participating in a moderate amount of physical activity, and carefully monitoring their weight gain. Women should talk to their doctors and a dietitian about how many calories they should eat each day, and how to gain the right amount of weight,” she advised.