

# Healthy Pregnancy and Me

A Guide to Healthy  
Weight Gain  
in Pregnancy

# Pregnancy

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Pregnancy is a time of great change for women. Changes in lifestyle, body and mind. In order to have the healthiest pregnancy possible it is important that you are aware of the healthy changes you can make to benefit you and your baby.

This brochure outlines the importance of maintaining a healthy pregnancy weight through nutrition and physical activity.

**The information included here is further explored online at**

**[www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme](http://www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme)**

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**References:** **1.** Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC). 2009. Weight Gain during Pregnancy: Re-examining the guidelines. Washington DC: The National Academies Press. **2.** Melzer, K., Schutz, Y., Boulvain, M. & Kayser, B. Physical Activity and Pregnancy: Cardiovascular Adaptations, Recommendations and Pregnancy Outcomes. Sports Medicine. 2010; 40(6):493-507.

## Healthy Pregnancy Weight

*The amount of weight that you can gain to optimise the health outcomes for both yourself and your baby.*

To achieve the best possible pregnancy and birth outcomes it is important to manage your weight gain in pregnancy. Thanks to extensive research, there are recommendations available that help women to know what is healthy for them<sup>1</sup>.

## Weight Gain Recommendations

*Recommended weight ranges developed from good quality scientific studies of thousands of pregnant women of different weights and sizes.*

The healthy pregnancy weight recommendations are based on your pre-pregnancy body mass index (BMI). They also take into account the normal changes that happen to your body to accommodate your baby's growth (e.g., production of amniotic fluid & the placenta). So even if some of the weight goals seem low, in following them, there is no risk of not providing your baby of the nutrients and energy it needs.

Discussing the table below with your GP will give you an indication of the healthiest weight gain goal for you.

### Healthy pregnancy weight goals according to pre-pregnancy BMI

Pre-pregnancy BMI (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	Pregnancy weight goals*
Less than 18.5	12.5 – 18 kg
18.5 – 24.9	11.5 – 16 kg
25.0 – 29.9	7 – 11.5 kg
30.0 and above	5 – 9 kg

Source: Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC)<sup>1</sup>

\*For single pregnancies only (i.e. not twins, triplets).

**For more information on BMI and how to calculate it check out our website**  
[www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme](http://www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme)

## Why achieving a healthy pregnancy weight is important?

*Research tells us that having a healthy pregnancy weight can substantially reduce the health risks for mothers and babies during and after pregnancy.*

Staying within your optimum weight range during pregnancy will not only reduce the risk of complications for you and your baby during pregnancy and the birth but also improve future health outcomes for your baby. For example;

- Healthy weight gain positively influences a baby's fat and lean muscle tissue at birth and their growth trajectory reducing the chances of being overweight during childhood and adulthood; and
- A healthy diet in pregnancy and breastfeeding can increase a child's preference for healthy foods throughout life.

## I know my weight goal, what do I do now?

*Firstly, remember that having a healthy pregnancy weight is achievable!*

Healthy pregnancy weight goals do not mean restrictive dieting and extreme exercising- achieving them is about re-assessing your lifestyle habits, identifying small and sustainable changes, and taking steps to implement them.

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**Have a look at the following pages for information + tips on how to make these changes.**

## Nutrition and Pregnancy

Healthy eating is one of the key ways to achieve a healthy pregnancy weight. Despite the saying 'Eating for Two' there is actually minimal increase in energy requirements during pregnancy. However, there is a greater need for specific nutrients (e.g., folate, calcium, iron) - so the best approach is to eat twice as healthy, not twice as much.

## Benefits of Good Nutrition

When you are pregnant the advantages to good nutrition are two-fold, you're making a difference to the health of not only yourself but your baby too. Benefits such as:

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- ▶ Reduced need for birth intervention, e.g., forceps-delivery or caesarean section;
- ▶ Minimised discomfort of pregnancy e.g., heartburn, nausea/morning sickness, constipation, body aches and pains;
- ▶ Maintenance of nutrient body stores needed for efficient body functioning during and after pregnancy;
- ▶ Improved mental health and feelings of wellbeing;
- ▶ Improved sleep quality;
- ▶ Boosted immunity and energy levels;
- ▶ An easier return to pre-pregnancy weight;
- ▶ Helping babies to get the nutrients they need for healthy development;
- ▶ Reducing the risk of birth complications and the risk of injury or stress; and
- ▶ Promotion of a healthy metabolism and growth for your baby and a reduced risk of future overweight.

## The 80:20 Approach

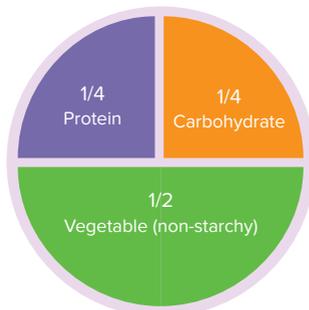
*It can be hard to transition into new behaviours and leave old ones behind. This is where the 80/20 approach comes in.*

It's important to recognise that any small change you make is beneficial. If you try to eat as healthily as possible for 80% of the time then there is room for more relaxed eating 20% of the time. Try to avoid deeming foods as either 'good' or 'bad' because motivating yourself with guilt is not sustainable for long-term change. Being flexible towards food and eating to your appetite and taste is a healthy approach.

## Tips for a Healthy Diet

**Here are a few ideas for a healthy approach to eating.**

- ▶ Try to be in touch with your hunger level: Eat when you feel the physical signs of hunger and pay attention to your appetite *i.e., eat until you feel nicely satisfied and not full.*
- ▶ Try to choose wholesome unprocessed foods most of the time, *i.e., eat twice as healthily, rather than twice as much.*
- ▶ Switch to healthier carbohydrates where possible as these sustain for longer with similar calories e.g., *swap wholemeal/white bread for wholegrain, potato for sweet potato or pasta, Jasmine rice for Basmati, Quick Oats for whole rolled oats.*
- ▶ For main meals, like dinner, balance your protein (*lean meat, skinless chicken, fish etc.*), carbohydrate (*pasta, rice, sweet potato, bread etc.*), and non-starchy vegetables (*green, orange, yellow and red vegetables raw or cooked*) on your plate as below;



**For some healthy Meal Plans check out our website [www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme](http://www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme)**

## Physical Activity and Pregnancy

*Simply put, our weight is determined by how much energy we gain from eating, minus the amount of energy we use in daily activity.*

If we consume more energy than we expend then we gain weight, and vice versa. So, keeping physically active during pregnancy, in combination with healthy eating, is the best way to maintain a healthy weight.

**For an outline of some safe exercises to do in pregnancy please refer to our website:  
[www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme](http://www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme)**

## Benefits of Physical Activity during Pregnancy

**Not only does regular physical activity prepare you for the marathon of birth it has many health benefits for: both you and your baby<sup>2</sup>:**

- Mental and emotional wellbeing benefits including reduced anxiety and mood swings;
- Giving yourself a chance to relax and unwind;
- Improving sleep quality;
- Boosting your muscular endurance, cardiorespiratory fitness, and energy levels while strengthening and toning muscles;
- Minimising the discomforts of pregnancy e.g., heartburn, nausea/morning sickness, constipation, body aches and pains including back and pelvic pain;
- Reducing fluid retention/swelling by assisting your circulation;
- Easing labour and birth e.g., 1st phase of labour can be shorter and being fit improves your ability to physically manage the birth; and
- Speeding up your recovery after birth and return to your pre-pregnancy weight.

## Barriers to Physical Activity

Making changes to your activity level can be challenging. To overcome any barriers the first step is to identify them. Below are some of the common barriers to maintaining regular physical activity during pregnancy and some tips to help:

### Barrier

**Being time-poor:** Women juggle many responsibilities that can leave them time-poor.

### Solutions

- ▶ **Plan Ahead:** Look at your schedule and block out times when you can do some physical activity.
- ▶ **Shorter Sessions:** If you can't spare a 30 minute block, break it down into shorter sessions.
- ▶ **Incidental Exercise:** Incorporate physical activity into your daily life e.g., park further away from the supermarket so that you walk more, getting off public transport one stop earlier.
- ▶ **Active Family Time:** Combine family time with being physically active e.g., go for a walk with your partner, take your children to the park and play *with* them (also a helpful solution if there is a lack of childcare available to you).

### Barrier

**Lack of motivation:** When you are tired and physically uncomfortable motivation can be hard to find.

### Solutions

- ▶ **Start Simple:** Try simple activities like walking and gradually increase the intensity e.g., start a beginners' class in Yoga or Pilates.
- ▶ **Get Support:** Exercise with someone e.g., your partner, a friend, or someone from your antenatal class. Use it as a chance to catch-up.
- ▶ **Focus on the Benefits:** Remind yourself of the benefits of regular physical activity for you and your baby.
- ▶ **Keep it Achievable:** Avoid the trap of the 'all or nothing' approach and start by setting an achievable goal for increasing your activity.
- ▶ **Enjoy it!** Find an activity that you actually enjoy. Exercise should not be dull or overwhelming, don't let the challenge deter you.
- ▶ **Variation:** Vary your activities to keep it interesting, experiment with different things and choose what works for you.

## Behaviour Change Goals

To maximise your chance of success in making healthy changes to your eating habits and activity levels take the time to set yourself some 'S.M.A.R.T' Goals i.e., goals that are:

### Specific

Write your goal clearly and specifically, as if it is an instruction telling you what to do e.g., *instead of "walk more" set the goal "go for a walk for at least 15 minutes, 4 days per week during March"*.

Ask Yourself ► "How much? How often? For how long?"

### Measurable

Make sure you can measure your progress towards a specific goal and keep a record so that you can know if it has been achieved. This will help motivate you and provide a confidence-boost for when you make progress.

Ask Yourself ► "How will I know when it is accomplished?"

### Achievable

Goals should be ambitious, but not impossible. You may have to break larger goals into smaller ones so that you establish a baseline from which you can gradually build on. It is also important to recognise the other steps that are necessary to achieve your goal e.g., *waking up 15 minutes earlier so that you can park a few blocks away from work to increase your activity.*

Ask Yourself ► "How am I going to achieve this?"

### Relevant

Your goal should be relevant to you and something you want to achieve. It must be your own goal and not someone else's e.g., *not just what your partner or your health professional thinks you should do.*

Ask Yourself ► "Does this seem worthwhile and relevant to me? Is this the right time to make this change?"

### Time-Specific

Attach a time-frame for a healthy sense of urgency and to prevent you from feeling as if it is okay to start and finish whenever.

Ask Yourself ► "When do I aim to achieve my goal?"

## Some examples of S.M.A.R.T Goals to help Achieve Lifestyle Change

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Good Goal:             | To eat healthier   |
| <b>S.M.A.R.T Goal:</b> | I will eat at least two servings of fruit every day for the next month.  |
| Good Goal:             | To get more sleep  |
| <b>S.M.A.R.T Goal:</b> | I will go to bed by 10:30 pm every weeknight for the next two weeks.   |
| Good Goal:             | To drink more water  |
| <b>S.M.A.R.T Goal:</b> | I will have water with lunch, instead of my usual soda, every day this week.   |
| Good Goal:             | To work out  |
| <b>S.M.A.R.T Goal:</b> | I will go to the gym at least three times a week for the next month. Each time, I will do at least 20 minutes on the stationary bike or treadmill. |

Nutrition and physical activity during pregnancy play a key role in you and your baby's health. However, pregnancy is also a time when women often battle with challenges to making healthy decisions. By keeping aware of the importance of diet and activity as well as some helpful strategies to cope with the demands of pregnancy you will be better equipped to handle these challenges.

Empowering yourself to make healthy lifestyle changes will help to result in the best outcomes for yourself and your baby, now and into the future.

**If you have any questions please discuss them with your GP.  
For more tips and support please refer to our website -  
[www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme](http://www.telethonkids.org.au/healthypregnancyandme)**