

# Pregnancy and Weight Gain

Pregnancy is often blamed for later weight gain. But this is usually due to lifestyle change, not to any biological change that occurs with pregnancy. This handout discusses some factors that influence post-pregnancy weight gain and what you can do to prevent it.

## Factors influencing weight gain in pregnancy

1. The extent of gestational weight gain: Excessive gain during pregnancy can lead to greater post-partum retention of weight. Ideal weight gain is up to 12.5kg. If you are overweight before pregnancy a gain of around 6kg is plenty.
2. Education level: Postnatal weight gain appears to be greatest in mothers with lower educational levels and who have several children.
3. Number of pregnancies: Generally, the older a mother is and the more children she has, the more likely she will be to put on extra weight after giving birth.
4. Level of 'restrained' eating: 'Overly-restrained eaters' are at particular risk of gestational weight gain, because of the excuse to 'eat for two' during pregnancy.
5. Speed of return to work: Some research has indicated that the earlier women return to work outside the home after giving birth, the greater their weight loss. An early return to exercise can also aid in the post-partum prevention of weight gain.

## Ways of minding your weight after childbirth

- Don't gain too much weight during pregnancy: This is a different message to that often given. But you can over do it as well as under do it. Don't diet, but also don't over-eat.
- Breastfeed: This burns up lots of energy and if food intake is carefully balanced it can often be a window of opportunity for weight loss.
- Exercise early: An early return to physical activity after birth will help control weight and will have no effect on milk quality or quantity.
- Don't try to 'eat for two': Both during and after pregnancy, genuine hunger is the best guide to your energy needs. There's no benefit in over-eating to cater for two.
- Learn ways of coping with stress: Over-eating often occurs in response to stress. Learning ways of dealing with stress will help reduce your risk. Ask your doctor for patient information sheet 4.1 on 'dealing with stress', if this is likely to be an issue for you.

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