

## PREGNANCY WEIGHT: BREAKING IT DOWN

Everyday in the obstetrician's office, pregnant women are questioning if they are gaining too much weight or too little weight. Everyone seems to have an opinion for the soon-to-be mother and issues of weight, diet and exercise become very important. Women are bombarded with co-workers saying they are "way too big" or their due date "can't be right", grandmothers encouraging them to "eat for two", and husbands adding "maybe you should exercise--just a little." These ideas often lead to confusion so it is reasonable to discuss appropriate weight gain in regards to pregnancy.

First, recommendations for weight gain start with a woman's pre-pregnancy weight. For those women starting at normal or "ideal" body weight, the recommended gain is 25-35 pounds. Women who are overweight should try to gain less at 15-20 pounds. For women classified as underweight, the recommendations are slightly more weight gain at 28-40 pounds. These are general guidelines only, and I feel the most important concept is maintaining a healthy diet and appropriate level of physical activity. Following these guidelines provides numerous benefits for the expectant mother. They will feel better with more overall energy and less aches and pains. They will do better in labor and be more likely to deliver vaginally. The risk of dreaded "stretch marks" will be reduced and the return to pre-pregnancy weight will be faster.

### Where does the weight go?

Baby	7.5 pounds
Breast growth	2 pounds
Maternal stores (fat and protein)	7 pounds
Placenta	1.5 pounds
Uterus	2 pounds
Amniotic fluid	2 pounds
Maternal blood	4 pounds
Body fluids	4 pounds

Common misconceptions in pregnancy include ideas on nutrition. Women are often told they must "eat for two" or eat more to "feed the baby." This often leads to excess food intake followed by excess weight gain. In reality, pregnancy only requires an additional 300 calories per day. This is nothing more than a small snack during the day such as half a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a glass of milk. A healthy, balanced diet is best for a pregnant woman and the optimal time to start eating healthy is before becoming pregnant. Diets should include a good mixture of fruits and vegetables plus some form of protein (meat, poultry or fish). Vegetarians will need additional supplements and all pregnant women should take extra iron and folic acid. These additional nutrients are most commonly given in pill form. Of note, most fish and shellfish are safe in pregnancy despite recent concerns. Pregnant women should avoid certain large, open water fish that can contain high levels of mercury (including shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish and albacore tuna). Other fish and chunk light tuna are fine and rarely do women in the Panhandle consume enough fish to be a problem.

Exercise is another part of maintaining a healthy pregnancy and keeping weight gain under control. Regular exercise is recommended for all healthy, pregnant women. Certain pregnancy complications and chronic medical conditions may prohibit women from exercising and these should be discussed with her prenatal care provider. Benefits of exercise include reduced aches and pains, prevention of gestational diabetes, increased energy, improved mood, promotion of muscle tone and strength, and help with sleep. Women who exercise regularly before pregnancy can safely maintain a weight bearing exercise regimen of 60 minutes of moderate intensity exercise five days per week. For more sedentary women, exercising 30 minutes most days of the week is beneficial. Safe exercises include walking, swimming, cycling and low-impact aerobics. Many hospitals and gyms now offer exercise classes specifically geared to pregnant woman and these are excellent resources. More intense exercise is often appropriate for those women who have participated prior to pregnancy. Activities with high risk for injury should be avoided and these include contact sports, downhill snow skiing and scuba diving.

These are just a few guidelines for mothers-to-be. As always, you must be careful with advice and information provided by well-meaning friends, colleagues, and family. Pregnancy is a great and exciting time for a woman and outcomes can be optimized with appropriate weight gain, a healthy diet and exercise.

The physicians and staff of Panhandle Obstetrics and Gynecology want to wish everyone a happy and prosperous new year. We thank all of you for your continued support and we are honored to serve the women of the Texas panhandle.