

# WEIGHT GAIN DURING PREGNANCY



the women's  
the royal women's hospital  
victoria australia

Understanding your weight gain is the first step towards a healthy pregnancy.

The amount of weight you gain during pregnancy can affect your own health as well as your baby's health and development. But how much should you gain?

The recommended amount of weight gain depends on your pre-pregnancy weight. Use the table below as a guide, remembering that it is a guide only and there are circumstances where a different weight goal may be recommended by your midwife, doctor or dietitian.

You will need to calculate your body mass index (BMI) to use the table. Your BMI is your pre-pregnancy weight in kilos divided by your height in meters squared. For example;

- if your pre-pregnancy weight is 72 kg and your height is 162 centimetres (1.62 meters), to work out your BMI divide your weight by your height then divide again by height, i.e.  
 $72 \div 1.62 \div 1.62 = 27$ .
- Your BMI is 27. Your recommended weight gain is 7 to 11 kilos

You can also follow how your weight is progressing by plotting it on a graph. *Graphs for your BMI available on our website.*

If you are having twins there is information about recommended weight gain in the fact sheet *Healthy eating when pregnant with twins*.

More than 50 per cent of women gain more than the recommended amount of weight. This extra weight increases the risk of gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy), high blood pressure, a difficult delivery and it can be hard to lose the weight after pregnancy. The baby may be bigger than normal increasing its risk of weight problems, diabetes and heart disease later in life.

Not gaining enough weight can also be a problem, especially if what you eat does not meet the nutrient requirements of pregnancy. Babies born too small have a risk of similar long-term health problems.

Many factors affect weight gain including how you eat and exercise as well as pregnancy symptoms such as nausea or appetite change.

BMI	Recommended weight gain over the whole pregnancy	Recommended weight gain per month in the 2nd and 3rd trimester *
BMI less than 18.5 ( <i>underweight</i> )	12.5 to 18kg	2 to 2.6kg
18.5 to 24.9 ( <i>healthy weight</i> )	11.5 to 16kg	1.5 to 2.3kg
18.5 to 22.9 if Asian		
25 to 29.9 ( <i>overweight</i> )	7 to 11.5kg	1 to 1.5kg
23 to 27.5 if Asian		
30 or more	5 to 9kg	0.8 to 1.2kg
or over 27.5 if Asian	(less than 7kg if Asian)	

\* Average gain in the first three months is 1/2 to 2 kilos for everyone.

## Pregnancy symptoms that can affect weight gain

Morning sickness can cause weight changes in the first trimester. Weight loss is not usually a problem as long as eating returns to normal in the second trimester. Weight will usually be regained and will continue to increase normally. If sickness is severe or prolonged seek advice from your doctor or midwife. See the *Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy* fact sheet for more information.

Nausea is sometimes helped by frequent eating and this may cause you to gain a few extra kilos in early pregnancy. The rate of weight gain usually slows down as nausea subsides and your appetite returns to normal.

Appetite changes, cravings and aversions may also occur, particularly in the first trimester and may affect weight. Appetite and taste often return to normal in the second trimester.

Fluid retention (oedema) can affect weight, especially later in pregnancy.

## What should I do if I'm not gaining enough weight?

If you're eating regular meals with a good variety of foods from the five food groups and your appetite is good, chances are that your low weight gain is not a problem. If you are not sure that you are eating enough, aim for three meals a day and snacks in between. Nutritious snacks include yoghurt, cheese and crackers, nuts, dried fruit, muesli bars and milk-based drinks.

Ask to see a dietitian if problems persist and you are not able to eat a nutritionally adequate diet.

## What should I do if I'm gaining too much weight or was overweight at the beginning of pregnancy?

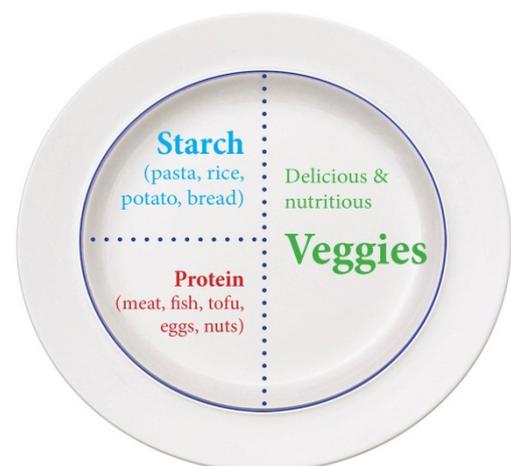
Pregnancy is not a time for strict dieting but you can afford to reduce kilojoules from energy dense foods like chocolate, lollies, takeaways, fried foods and sweet drinks.

If you are part way through your pregnancy and have gained more weight than recommended, the aim is to slow the rate of weight gain for the remainder of pregnancy, not to lose weight.

Ask to see a dietitian if you would like help with managing your weight.

### Here are some key steps to help you:

- Eat three meals every day - breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- Add mid meal snacks if hungry.
- Eating regular meals helps you to:
  - include all the nutrients and energy you need
  - regulate your metabolic rate and manage your weight
  - prevent you getting overly hungry and tempted by poor food choices, overeating or picking later in the day.
- Check your portion size.  
Have enough to make you comfortably full, not overfull. Base your meals on the 'healthy plate', with a large serve of vegetables or salad to fill you while keeping the calories down.



- Think of some foods as 'occasional' foods. These are foods that are high in added fats or sugar but low in nutrition. The average Australian gets nearly 40 per cent of their calories from 'discretionary foods' such as fast foods, potato chips, chocolate, biscuits, cakes, pastries, sweet muffins and sweet drinks. Small amounts of these are okay for most of us but large amounts can take the place of more nourishing foods. These foods are high in energy (calories or kilojoules) and are very easy to overeat, contributing to excess weight gain. To reduce the temptation:
  - Plan and prepare regular meals
  - Check your pantry - keep the less healthy snack foods to a minimum or out of sight.
  - If you need something sweet after a meal try stewed fruit or fruit salad with yoghurt or custard.
  - If you need a snack to see you through to the next meal try grainy crisp breads with cheese, a boiled egg, a handful of unsalted nuts, a tub of yoghurt, hummus with carrot sticks.
  - If you're still craving less healthy foods small portions may be enough to satisfy the craving. For example, chocolate cravings might be satisfied by a Freddo Frog or 2 or 3 squares of dark chocolate instead of a larger chocolate bar. A hot chocolate drink may also do the trick.
- Limit sweet drinks such as fruit juice, sports drinks, cordial and soft drinks as these can contain up to 10 teaspoons of sugar per drink (unless 'diet' or 'low-joule').

The *Planning meals and snacks* section below will help you choose foods to help you maintain a healthy pregnancy

## Exercise during pregnancy

All pregnant women without complications are encouraged to participate in regular exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle.

### Benefits of exercise

When you are pregnant the benefits of exercise include:

- Improved physical and mental well-being.
- Helps to prevent excessive weight gain.
- Reduces the risk of pregnancy-related complications such as gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia and hypertension.

If you do little or no exercise, start with walking or swimming and gradually increase the duration and frequency of your activity.

Recommendations are to build up to 150 minutes per week or 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on most days. Use the 'talk test' as a way to check the level of intensity, that is, aim to exercise at a comfortable level at which you are able to maintain a conversation.

### Safe exercises to do during pregnancy

- Brisk walking
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Cycling on a stationary bike
- Low impact aerobic exercise or 'pump' weight classes (let the teacher know you are pregnant)
- Water-based exercise such as aquaerobics
- Prenatal yoga or pilates

### Precautions for exercise in pregnancy

There are some exercises that involve positions and movements that may be uncomfortable or harmful for pregnant women. Speak to your doctor or physiotherapist if you are unsure.

In general, you should avoid:

- raising your body temperature too high
- lifting heavy weights; choose low weights and medium to high repetitions
- exercising to the point of exhaustion or if you are unwell; listen to your body!

## About sugars and fats

We all know that we should watch the amount of sugar and fats we have in our diet. This is especially important in pregnancy.

### When is sugar a problem?

The amount of natural sugar contained in fresh fruit and milk, as well as the sugar added to yogurt and custard, is **not** considered a problem. These foods are nourishing and you are unlikely to get too much sugar from eating these foods in normal amounts.

Small amounts of sugar such as a teaspoon of sugar in your coffee and tea or some jam or honey on bread are also not a problem.

Sugar can be a problem when it occurs in foods or drinks that have few other nutrients. If consumed in large amounts they can take the place of healthier foods or contribute excess calories and promote weight gain.

### How much sugar is in your drink?

Sugar-sweetened drinks are one of the main sources of excess sugar. Soft drinks, juices and cordial are much higher in sugar than most people realise with 4 to 10 teaspoons per drink. Even fruit juice labelled 'no added sugar' contains natural fruit sugar. Natural fruit sugar is not a problem in a piece of fruit however a large juice is equal to eating several fruits and doesn't fill you as fruit would. Limit the amount of sugar-sweetened drinks and fruit juices you drink. Sugar-sweetened drinks are best limited to occasionally.

Low joule (artificially sweetened) drinks contain no sugar and very few kilojoules. Moderate amounts of these sweeteners are safe for pregnancy.

### 1 teaspoon = 4g sugar

A simple way to calculate how much sugar is in drinks is to divide grams of sugar on the label by four to see how many teaspoons of sugar are in the drink.

 <p>Orange juice</p>	 <p>per 250 ml glass</p>
 <p>Cola</p>	 <p>per 375 ml can</p>
 <p>Cordial (diluted 1 in 4)</p>	 <p>per 250 ml glass</p>
 <p>Sports drink</p>	 <p>per 375 ml bottle</p>
 <p>Iced tea</p>	 <p>per 500ml bottle</p>

## When are fats and oils a problem?

Fats and oils add flavour and moistness to food. However, they are very energy dense which can be a problem if you are watching your weight.

Small amounts of oil used in cooking or the fats and oils that are naturally present in foods such as cheese, nuts or avocados are not a problem when these are eaten in moderation. These foods are also nutritious.

Problem foods are usually highly processed and have a combination of fat with sugar or salt that makes them irresistible and easy to overeat. They are also likely to contain less healthy types of fats. These foods include fast foods, chocolate, crisps, doughnuts, croissants, muffins, sweet biscuits, pies, sausage rolls, pasties and quiches and ice-cream. Serving sizes of many of these foods have increased over the years making them even easier to overeat.

If watching your weight, it helps to reduce the fat and oils in your meals as well as limiting high fat snacks and takeaways.

- Limit any food that contains breadcrumbs, pastry or batter.
- Limit take away foods to once per week at most.
- Use butter, margarine and oil sparingly.
- Choose low fat dairy foods – milk, cheese and yoghurt.
- Choose lean meats and trim visible fat from meat and skin from chicken.
- Use cooking methods such as grilling, steaming, barbequing or baking.
- Limit mayonnaise and creamy sauces.
- Limit rich desserts to special occasions.

The table below shows how much sugar and fat is in some popular snack and fast foods.

- 1 teaspoon = 4 grams sugar
- 1 cube of fat = 4 grams

 <p>50g chocolate (2 rows)</p>	
 <p>Scotch finger biscuit</p>	
 <p>Big Mac</p>	
 <p>30g potato chips</p>	
 <p>Large blueberry muffin (100g)</p>	

## Planning meals and snacks

Healthy eating takes a bit of planning. To help you with this we have collected together some ideas for meals and snacks you might like to try.

### Tips for healthy eating

- It helps to plan ahead; create a menu for the week and plan your shopping around this menu.
- Have healthy foods on hand so that you are less likely to be tempted by poor food choices and fast foods.
- Start a folder of your family's favourite recipes so that you have ideas readily on hand.
- Have a look at some of our meal ideas for inspiration.

Check out the websites listed below for more tips and healthy recipe.

### Ideas for breakfast

A healthy breakfast can help regulate your appetite and manage your weight. Suggestions include:

- Breakfast cereal and low-fat milk. Add some yoghurt and fruit. Higher fibre cereals containing oats, bran, nuts or dried fruits are more filling and will stop you getting hungry as quickly.
- Toast with nut butter, light cream cheese, sliced banana, vegemite, etc. Grainy breads are more filling. So are rye and sourdough.
- Baked beans, poached or boiled eggs, cooked tomato, spinach or mushrooms your toast.
- If you can't eat breakfast when you first get up, have something later in the morning or have a low-fat milk drink or smoothie for breakfast then a more substantial snack for morning tea.

### Ideas for lunch

You will feel fuller and more satisfied if your meal contains a balance of protein, carbohydrate and vegetables, salad or fruit. Proteins include meat, chicken, fish, dairy foods, eggs, nuts, tofu and legumes. Carbohydrates include bread (preferably whole grain as it's more filling and nutritious), potato, rice, pasta, noodles and quinoa as well as dried beans, lentils and sweet corn.

#### Here are some ideas:

- Small tin of tuna with bread, crackers or rice and a salad on the side.

- Sandwich or wrap using pita bread or mountain bread with reduced fat cheese, egg, hommus, tinned salmon or tuna. Add a salad filling or have an extra container of salad to fill you up.
- Toasted sandwich or mini pizza made with pita bread.
- Salads with tuna, egg, cheese or four bean mix or falafel. Add sweet corn, quinoa, potato salad or bread.
- Hearty soup such as lentil or minestrone.
- Leftovers such as stir-fried meat and vegetables or pasta containing vegetables or with a side salad.
- If buying lunch choose something that contains vegetables and is lower in fat e.g. stir-fries with plenty of vegetables. Avoid salad bars because of the risk of listeria

Then if still hungry have fruit or low-fat yoghurt.

### Ideas for dinner

Aim to cover about half your plate with salad or vegetables because these are low in energy (calories) and will fill you, as well as containing vitamins and antioxidants. Cover about one quarter of the plate with protein food (meat, chicken, lentils etc.) and the other quarter with carbohydrate (e.g. potato, rice, pasta).



Remember these proportions if making a stir fry, pasta or casserole.

If running short of time try:

- Pasta with bottled tomato sauce from supermarket. Add tuna, chicken, cheese and plenty of vegetables or a side salad.

- Chicken with bottled non-creamy sauce with rice/pasta and salad or vegetables.
- Microwaved potato and vegetables and tin of tuna or salmon.
- Omelette or frittata with some salad and bread.

If you'd like dessert, try stewed, canned or fresh fruit or fruit salad with reduced fat ice-cream, yoghurt or custard.

### Ideas for snacks

- A slice of grainy bread or crackers with cheese, tuna, peanut butter, avocado, light cream cheese
- Healthy breakfast cereal and low-fat milk
- Hardboiled egg
- A small tub of low-fat yoghurt
- Handful of raw or dry roasted unsalted nuts. Buy snack sized boxes or portion nuts into snap lock bags to help stop you overeating them
- Small handful of dried fruit or mixed dried fruit and nuts
- Fresh fruit
- Cup of fruit salad or stewed fruit
- Corn cob
- Cup of vegetable soup
- Celery or carrot sticks with dip such as hommus or tzatziki
- Pita bread cut up and lightly sprayed with oil then oven baked for a few minutes until crisp makes a good accompaniment to dips
- Toasted fruit loaf with a scrape of margarine or light cream cheese
- Bowl of plain popcorn
- Grainy crisp bread e.g. Vita-Weats or Ryvita and cheese
- Rice cakes or corn cakes with a spread
- English muffin or crumpet and peanut butter, avocado or light cream cheese
- Roasted chick peas
- 1 to 2 Arnott's Snack Right Fruit Slice or Fruit Pillow biscuits
- A slice of raisin bread and cream cheese
- A scoop of light ice cream occasionally
- Small can of baked beans.

## For more information

### On the Women's website

Nutrition in Pregnancy fact sheets

[www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#n](http://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#n)

- Healthy eating when you're pregnant
- Healthy eating when you're pregnant: Information for vegetarians and vegans
- Healthy eating when pregnant with twins
- Good nutrition in breastfeeding
- Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy
- Food safety in pregnancy

Weight gain during pregnancy: Graphs for your BMI

[www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#w](http://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#w)

### Other relevant websites

#### Baker Heart & Diabetes Institute

[www.baker.edu.au/health-hub/fact-sheets](http://www.baker.edu.au/health-hub/fact-sheets)

This website aimed at information about prevention and treatment of diabetes and heart disease has a number of useful fact sheets such as

- Healthy snacks
- Eating out
- Supermarket shopping guide
- Label reading

#### Better Health Channel

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/pregnancy-and-exercise](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/pregnancy-and-exercise)

#### Sports Medicine Australia

[sma.org.au/resources-advice/policies-and-guidelines/active-women-in-sport/](http://sma.org.au/resources-advice/policies-and-guidelines/active-women-in-sport/)

### For recipe ideas

#### Better Health Channel

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/recipes](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/recipes)

#### Healthy Food Guide

[www.healthyfoodguide.com.au/](http://www.healthyfoodguide.com.au/)