

Pregnancy In Obese Women

The following is a summary of the article “Pregnancy in obese women: What you need to know” from *Contemporary OB/Gyn*, November 2008:

- It is estimated that approximately one third of pregnant women are obese in the United States. Both overweight and obesity are linked with a number of maternal and fetal complications.
- The complications can include gestational diabetes and hypertensive disorders in the mother, and congenital malformations such as heart and neural tube defects in the baby. The risk of an infant who is stillborn also increases. In fact, the risk of fetal death is more than twice the rate in obese women.
- Prepregnancy management can make a big difference to decreasing the above risks as well as additional risks to the infant later in life. Research shows that infants born to mothers with a higher weight during pregnancy are more likely to become obese as adults.
- If you are overweight or obese and are planning to become pregnant, please discuss your plans with your physician. Weight loss can prevent complications and also increase your fertility. Management of obesity during pregnancy usually involves the avoidance of excessive weight gain. Significant weight loss during pregnancy is generally discouraged.
- Weight loss surgery is one tool that can be used to help morbidly obese patients. There is evidence showing that obese women undergoing bariatric surgery to revert to a lower weight prior to pregnancy can prevent the complications described above. It’s important to note that pregnancy is not recommended until at least 12 months after bariatric surgery. At LifeWeigh we recommend waiting 18-24 months.
- If you are overweight or obese and are currently pregnant, discuss a balanced diet with a dietitian to ensure you can meet all your nutritional needs without gaining excessive weight. Supplemental folic acid up to 5 mg may also be recommended as obesity is associated with lower blood values and an increased risk of neural tube defects. However, do not take any supplements without first discussing your needs with your physician.
- It is important to get back to a healthy weight after your pregnancy as well. A nutritionally balanced diet and exercise are just as essential during the post-partum period.

-Summary compiled by Sherrill Johnson, RD, LDN