
**One plus one: the consequences of weight gain in pregnancy**

How much is too much? Since the early 1900s, this question has plagued those who work in the field of maternal and child health. The weight gained during pregnancy is part of a carefully-regulated process designed to support fetal development. Any large deviations above or below the norm increases the health risks for mother and child, including delivery complications, abnormal childhood weight and lingering excess postpartum weight in the mother. In the US alone, the recommendations for weight gain during pregnancy for normal women have increased from 7kg in the 1930s to 11.5-16 kg today.\(^1\) And as for speed limits, recent studies have shown that over half of American women exceeded this guideline.\(^2,3\)

According to Sharon Herring and Emily Oken\(^4\), maternal weight gain during pregnancy is becoming a matter of critical importance: less than one-third of expectant mothers follow the recommendations for weight gain.

Herring and Oken point out that gestational weight gain is particularly harmful, compared to gaining weight at other times in life. Fat deposits stored during pregnancy tend to accumulate around the center of the body, and share the same perturbed hormonal status linked with obesity and insulin resistance. Evidence from many studies has shown that overly low or high gestational weight gain poses certain risks to mother and child.

In light of this evidence, why do so many women deviate from the guidelines? In normal men and women, weight gain is influenced by diverse factors, including diet, genetics, amount of physical activity, TV viewing, and insufficient sleep. But there is little information on how these factors affect weight gain in pregnant women. Furthermore, no studies on weight gain have followed the health of mothers and children into the postpartum period.

Armed with the latest guidelines, Herring and Oken suggest that obstetric clinicians can play an important role in educating their pregnant patients on weight gain. While there are many questions that remain to be answered, one thing is clear: simply keeping gestational weight gain under control can have long-term benefits for mothers and the generation of children to come.

**References**