

Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition



June 2009

New Weight Guidelines for Pregnancy Reflect Need for Diet, Activity Guidance

Recommendations for weight gain during pregnancy were updated and released by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) in late May. The new recommendations reflect a range of weight gains that allow good outcomes. The new guidelines replace ones released in 1990 – and many

key aspects of the health of women of childbearing age have changed since then. These changes include a higher proportion of women from racial/ethnic subgroups, and higher prepregnancy body mass index (BMI) and gestational weight gain (GWG) among all population subgroups.

The new guidelines differ from the 1990 ones in two ways. First, the new guidance is based on the World Health Organization (WHO) cutoff points for the BMI categories instead of the Metropolitan Life Insurance tables used in the past. Second, the new guidelines identify a specific, narrower range of recommended weight gain for obese women.

New Recommendations for Total and Rate of Weight Gain During Pregnancy, by Prepregnancy BMI

Prepregnancy BMI	BMI ⁺ (kg/m ²)	Total Weight Gain (lbs)	Rates of Weight Gain* 2nd and 3rd Trimester (lbs/week)
Underweight	<18.5	28-40	1 (1-1.3)
Normal weight	18.5-24.9	25-35	1 (0.8-1)
Overweight	25.0-29.9	15-25	0.6 (0.5-0.7)
Obese (includes all classes)	>30.0	11-20	0.5 (0.4-0.6)

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+ To calculate BMI go to www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/

* Calculations assume a 0.5–2 kg (1.1–4.4 lbs) weight gain in the first trimester (based on Siega-Riz et al., 1994; Abrams et al., 1995; Carmichael et al., 1997)

Early research shows that the mean gains of underweight women fall within the new guidelines, but some normal weight women may exceed the recommendations.

Furthermore, it is believed that a majority of overweight or obese women *will likely* exceed the new weight guidelines. Because of these data, it is assumed that **women will need assistance in meeting the guidelines – especially those who are overweight or obese at the time of conception.**

Interventions to prevent excessive weight gain during pregnancy may need to occur at both the individual and community level, and should address both dietary intake and physical activity.

Some special populations are addressed in the IOM committee's report. **Women of short stature** are recommended to gain at the lower end of the range for their prepregnant BMI. **Pregnant adolescents** may typically safely follow the new

guidelines for adult BMI cutoff levels, though younger adolescents often need to gain more to improve birth outcomes. **Racial or ethnic groups** should follow the new recommendations in general, but more research is needed in this area. **Women carrying twins** are offered the following recommendations: normal weight women should gain 37 – 54 pounds, overweight women 31-50 pounds and obese women, 25-42 pounds at term.

Recommendations were made from the perspective that the reproductive cycle begins before conception and continues through the first year after birth. Maternal weight status throughout the entire cycle affects both mother and child. Offering preconceptional services, such as counseling on diet and physical activity to women in order to help them reach a healthy weight before conceiving, may reduce their obstetric risk and normalize infant birth weight. Diet and

physical activity counseling for all pregnant and postpartum women may improve the health of the infant and support the mother's healthy weight and long-term health.

For more information: Copies of *Weight Gain During Pregnancy: Reexamining the Guidelines* are available from the National Academies Press; tel. 202-334-3313 or 1-800-624-6242 or on the Internet at <http://www.nap.edu/>. The PDF of the report is free to download; print versions are available for sale. To receive a special discount of 25% for Nutrition News readers only who visit the [nap.edu](http://www.nap.edu) site and purchase the print version, enter code NUTNEW.

Source: National Academy of Sciences (2009). Rasmussen, KM and Yaktine, AL, eds. *Weight gain during pregnancy: Reexamining the guidelines*. Accessed at http://www.nap.educatalog.php?record_id=12584

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office. The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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