

# Worth the Weight

## Pregnancy Nutrition For a Healthy Baby

In recent years the American population has been inundated with information on the growing threat of obesity. According to studies by the American Heart Association rates of obesity have steadily risen over the past few decades with obesity now affecting nearly a third of the population. Increased risk of heart attack, stroke and diabetes are all possible health affects of excessive weight gain.

With so much emphasis placed on maintaining a healthy waistline, one important portion of the population has fallen victim to the hype: pregnant women. According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, one in four women in Colorado do not gain enough weight during pregnancy. In fact, the largest contributor to low birth weight babies in the state is inadequate weight gain during pregnancy, a factor greater even than maternal smoking.

A statewide campaign called “A Healthy Baby is Worth the Weight,” has been launched to combat this growing trend. Mandy McCulloch, the prenatal program coordinator for CDPHE, says that pregnancy is not a time for dieting, but for making healthy food choices. McCulloch gives the following advice to ensure healthy weight gain and overall nutrition during pregnancy.

**Educate Yourself:** Many women may not be aware of what is considered normal weight gain during pregnancy. According to McCulloch, many women fall victim to the outdated notions of their mothers and grandmothers regarding their figures when expecting. While doctors in the ‘50s may have prescribed only a 15 pound weight gain during pregnancy, this is no longer considered the norm.

As a general rule, most women gain 2 to 5 pounds in the first trimester. After that, aim for a 1 pound weight gain per week. Your Body Mass Index, or BMI, is a measure of your

height and weight, and should be calculated based on your pre-pregnancy weight. This number will help you and your doctor determine your weight gain range for pregnancy. Normal weight gain falls between 25 and 35 pounds. If you are over or underweight prior to pregnancy, or if you are carrying more than one baby, those numbers will need to be adjusted.

**Break Down the Weight Gain:** It may be helpful for women to see how pregnancy weight is distributed throughout the body. Many women only associate weight gain with the weight of the baby, but added weight comes from the placenta and amniotic fluid, both of which are present in the womb and needed to support a healthy baby. Breasts and the uterus also increase in size and weight during pregnancy, accounting for up to 5 pounds of added weight. Your blood volume, body fluids, and protein and fat stores also increase dramatically during pregnancy and account for a large portion of total weight gain.

**Combat Morning Sickness:** Nausea during pregnancy can contribute to poor weight gain, so McCulloch offers these tips:

- Don't skip meals. An empty stomach can make you feel worse. Try eating five or six small meals during the day to avoid long periods without eating.

- Eat foods high in carbohydrates like pasta, potatoes, rice and breads.

- Eat before getting out of bed in the morning. Try keeping crackers, dry cereal, or toast on your night stand for when you first wake up.

**Make Changes Slowly:** Just as your body takes time to grow and adapt during pregnancy, you should also make changes to your diet over a period of time. Many women assume their diet needs to be perfect from the moment of conception, but cut yourself some slack. McCulloch advises expectant mothers to look to where their diet is strong and continue those habits, or to where it is weak and gradually make improvements. Pick one or two things to

focus on and set goals for yourself.

If your diet is filled with grains and carbohydrates, try slowly introducing fruits and vegetables. Find one or two that you like, say bananas and carrots, and try to eat at least one serving of each a day. Once that becomes comfortable, try introducing another source from each group, and continue on that course until you meet the recommended 2-4 servings of fruit and 3-5 servings of vegetables.

If you drink several sodas a day, try cutting back to one soda and begin drinking water instead. It is also helpful for you to carry water with you wherever you go. If you find that you have finished off your 32 ounce water bottle midway through the day, fill it up again and see if you can't reach the recommended 64 ounces.

**Get Into a Routine:** Many modern women have more and more demands placed on their time. Juggling a career, school, family and other issues may make pregnancy nutrition seem like yet another issue to contend with. If you can develop a routine for eating and taking care of yourself during pregnancy, chances are you will be able to transfer those habits into a more healthy lifestyle after the birth of your child. Here's some tips from McCulloch for getting started:

- Eat on a regular schedule every 2-3 hours. Eat a small portion if you cannot eat a full meal and don't wait until you are hungry to eat.

- Exercise everyday. Regular exercise will help you feel hungry at meal times. Activities such as walking are safe and easy and can have the added benefit of reducing stress.

- Limit Sweets. Sugary foods dull your appetite. If you can't avoid sweets, choose healthy ones. Oatmeal cookies, cereal bars and milkshakes are better choices than candy, doughnuts, or soda.

-If you smoke, stop. Smoking can also dull your appetite and causes health problems for both you and your baby.

**Stop Obsessing About Your Weight:** While you may not be ready to parade yourself in front of the nearest mirror to show off your new physique, you should not let your weight obsession get in the way of healthy eating habits. Concerns about your weight may be preventing you from eating enough and causing you to gain too little. Talk with your doctor about how much to eat as well as what to eat.

Information is available from a wide range of sources including your local library, nutritionists, and programs such as WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), which offers education and assistance to qualified pregnant women. The online site for CDHPE can also be accessed at [www.healthy-baby.org](http://www.healthy-baby.org), and provides information and resources at the click of a mouse.

Many women also worry about their ability to lose pregnancy weight after their baby is born. Most women are able to return to their normal weight within 6-12 months after giving birth. Breastfeeding can help speed up this process and has many other health benefits for the baby as well. The bottom line is that if you stay within the recommended guidelines for weight gain, you should not have any significant problems returning to your pre-pregnancy weight. Remember, you have permission to eat for your baby!

Keep in mind that women who don't gain enough weight during pregnancy are almost twice as likely to deliver a low birth weight baby compared to women who gain the proper amount of weight. Low birth weight babies, babies who weigh 5 pounds, 8 ounces or less, are not just small babies. They are more likely to suffer from health problems and long-term disabilities like cerebral palsy, sight and hearing problems, learning problems in school and even death.

It's time to start spreading the message of the CDPHE, "A Healthy Baby is Worth the Weight!"