

How does my weight affect my fertility?

Maternity Services



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT I LOSE WEIGHT?

You may be aware that being overweight or obese can lead you to develop a number of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancers. There is also a connection between your weight and fertility. This leaflet will provide some information on the connection and allow you to understand why it can make a difference.

It is not completely understood how weight affects fertility, but we do know that being overweight and where on your body fat is stored will make a difference to the hormones you produce. This can affect ovulation and how regular your periods are. If your body mass index is greater than 35 kg/m² you may not be eligible for NHS infertility treatment.

If you are eligible for infertility treatment, being overweight will mean that any drugs you are given to try to bring on ovulation will be less likely to work properly. In some women, a weight loss of as little as 5% of your body weight can restore ovulation. In other words, if you weigh 80kg (12st 8) losing as little as 4kg (8 and a half lbs), could make a big difference to your fertility.

FERTILITY RELATED RISKS OF BEING OVERWEIGHT

Weight gain can be a symptom of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome and many women who have issues with weight gain may be unaware that they are suffering from this syndrome. Therefore it is essential you contact your GP to check this out.

- ❖ Infertility
- ❖ Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, women present with symptoms such as:
 - ◆ Weight gain
 - ◆ Irregular periods
 - ◆ Amenorrhea (no periods)
 - ◆ Acne
 - ◆ Increased facial and body hair
 - ◆ Alopecia (*hair loss in varying degrees*)
- ❖ Subfertility (*problems getting pregnant*) Drugs used to increase fertility may not be as effective.
- ❖ If you become pregnant following infertility treatments such as egg donation or IVF there is a four times increased risk of miscarriage.

PREGNANCY RISKS OF BEING OVERWEIGHT FOR YOU

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| ❖ Increased risk of miscarriage | ❖ Increased Instrumental Delivery such as forceps or ventouse extraction |
| ❖ Difficulty to perform ultrasound and poor visual images | ❖ Increased Caesarean Section rate |
| ❖ Hypertension
(<i>high blood pressure</i>) | ❖ Wound Infection |
| ❖ Pre-eclampsia | ❖ Anaesthetic Problems |
| ❖ Thromboembolism
(<i>blood clots</i>) | ❖ Postpartum Haemorrhage |
| ❖ Cardiac Disease | ❖ Shoulder Dystocia |
| ❖ Diabetes | ❖ Trauma |
| ❖ Gestational Diabetes | ❖ Poor Breastfeeding Outcome |
| ❖ Prolonged Labour | ❖ Longer Stay In hospital |

RISKS OF BEING OVERWEIGHT FOR YOUR BABY

Congenital abnormalities such as:

- ❖ Spina Bifida
- ❖ Fetal Distress
- ❖ Macrosomia (*Big Baby*)
- ❖ Birth Injury during delivery
- ❖ Admission to Neonatal Unit
- ❖ Stillbirth
- ❖ Neonatal death

It is also important to note, that if you do become pregnant, having a healthy diet and including daily exercise will make a big difference to the outcome of your pregnancy and to the health of you and your baby.

TOP TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

- ✓ **Try to eat regular meals and especially do not miss breakfast.** Skipping meals and having an irregular meal pattern can actually make you put weight on; regardless of the calories you eat. Your meals should be based around starchy foods such as bread, potatoes, pasta, rice and cereals to provide energy and vitamins. They are not as fattening as some people think however watch how you cook them and what you add to them as that is when the calories increase. Wholegrain and wholemeal varieties are best as they can help keep you feeling fuller for longer.

- ✓ **Be more active.** Increasing activity can not just help with losing weight but can make you feel good as the body's natural happy hormones are released during exercise.

- ✓ **Aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day (but no more than 9).** 1 portion is: a large piece of fruit like an apple, orange or banana, 2 small pieces of fruit like tangerines or plums, a small glass of fresh fruit juice, 3 tablespoons of chopped fruit, 3 tablespoons of cooked vegetables, 1 cereal bowl of salad or 1 bowl of vegetable soup. Only 1 glass of fresh fruit juice should be drunk a day as it is high in calories however is nutritious due to the Vitamin C content. Potatoes do not count as a vegetable.

✓ **Cut down on fatty foods** such as cheese, butter, cream, oils, crisps, chips, cakes and biscuits and processed meat products such as sausages and pies and try not to fry. Grill, steam, bake, microwave or dry roast instead. Choose lower fat versions of dairy products such as semi-skimmed or skimmed milk and light or fat-free yoghurts. Have no more than a matchbox size piece of cheese per week.

✓ **Watch your sugar intake** and cut down on sweets, chocolates, sugary drinks, puddings, cakes and biscuits. These foods, although taste nice, provide very little nourishment but plenty calories.

✓ **Try not to have convenience foods too often** such as ready meals, jars and packets of sauces and takeaway/ fast foods. As well as being high in fat many of these foods contain more than the recommended 6g of salt (a teaspoonful) per day. Eating too much salt can increase your blood pressure. Try to make as much food from fresh as possible and you will save a fortune too!

✓ **Try to drink plenty fluids.** We need at least 6 to 8 cups or glasses (1.2-1.5 litres) of fluid every day and more when the weather is warmer. Often we can mistake thirst for hunger therefore drinking regularly can help reduce unnecessary snacking. Remember to avoid sugary drinks to cut down on calories. Alcohol is also high in calories therefore try to minimise your intake, especially if trying to conceive.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like more support in managing your weight, ask your Doctor, Nurse or Health Professional to refer you to a Dietitian.

More dietary information can also be found on the following websites:

- ❖ www.eatwell.gov.uk
- ❖ www.bdaweightwise.com

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