



Women who have a raised BMI in Pregnancy

What is a raised BMI

BMI (Body mass index) is the standard way of expressing weight and is calculated using your height to weight ratio.

- BMI 18.5 – 25 is a person's ideal weight
- BMI \geq 25 is classed as overweight
- BMI \geq 30 is classed as obese
- BMI \geq 40 is classed as morbidly obese

Morbid obesity is a term used to indicate when a person's weight is very significantly detrimental to their overall health and wellbeing.

How can having a raised BMI affect my pregnancy

Women with a BMI of 40 or more at the start of pregnancy increase their risk of complications during pregnancy, labour and after the birth. If you have a BMI of 40 or more at booking your midwife will refer you for an appointment with an obstetrician when you attend for your 20 week anomaly scan.

Healthy eating

It is really important to try and avoid further weight gain or aim to put on no more than approximately 9kgs during your pregnancy. It is important that you have a low fat, low sugar, high fibre diet and aim to eat 5 portions of fruit or vegetables a day and drink plenty of water. You will also be offered the chance to see the hospital dietician if you wish to discuss any difficulties with your diet

- Difficulty recording the baby's heartbeat

If your BMI is 40 or more (a BMI of 35 or more if it is your first baby) we usually recommend that you give birth in hospital to ensure that the doctors and midwives can respond quickly if any problems occur. Delivery suite also keeps specialist equipment for women with an increased BMI.

Do I need to see an anaesthetist?

If your BMI is 40 or more you have the option of seeing an anaesthetist. The anaesthetist will assess you and discuss your options for pain relief during labour and birth. An epidural may be harder to place and be more difficult to get working straight away, so you may be advised to have it placed early in labour rather than later. If you need a Caesarean section the epidural may be used for the operation, reducing the risk of a general anaesthetic, which can carry more risk than in women with a lower BMI.

During labour we advise that you do not eat any solid or fatty foods; it is safer just to drink water or non fizzy sports drinks. Antacid tablets will be offered during labour, these are given to relieve heartburn and reduce the risk of acid forming in your stomach. We would also recommend that a cannula is put in place, in order that intravenous fluids can be given quick if needed. When you are admitted in labour the duty anaesthetist will be informed, and will be available if required.

Exercise

Generally exercise is safe for both you and your unborn baby. Pregnancy can be a time for making changes and exercise is known to have benefits during the pregnancy by reducing some of the common complaints such as tiredness, varicose veins and leg swelling as well as complications such as gestational diabetes. You are encouraged to participate in exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle. If you did not take part in regular exercise before pregnancy it is acceptable to start doing so now. Try to incorporate some type of aerobic activity on a daily basis such as a 30 minute walk and gradually build this up to a brisk walk for 30 minutes a day. Please see useful website links below for further information about exercising in pregnancy. Please speak to your doctor or midwife if you are unsure about exercising during pregnancy

Diabetes

Having a raised BMI will increase your risk of getting diabetes. The higher your BMI, the greater the chance is of you developing diabetes. Therefore women who have a BMI of 30 or more will be offered a glucose tolerance test at 28 weeks gestation to screen for gestational diabetes (pregnancy related diabetes).

High Blood Pressure

Women with an increased BMI are at greater risk of developing high blood pressure. Your midwife or doctor will assess your wellbeing and blood pressure at each antenatal visit and more frequently if indicated. Having high blood pressure at the onset of your pregnancy puts you at increased risk of developing a more serious condition called pre-eclampsia. One sign of pre-eclampsia can be protein in the urine, therefore it is important to provide a sample of urine at each appointment.

Blood Clots (Thrombosis)

Women with a BMI 30 or more are at a significantly higher risk of thrombosis and this risk is highest in the days after delivery. This is the case whether the delivery was vaginal but even more so if it was by caesarean section. This is especially relevant if you have had a blood clot in the past or your mother, father, brother, sister or any other children have had one before the age of 50. If this is the case you will be referred to an Obstetrician. Thrombosis is a serious and potentially life threatening complication.

The symptoms of a deep vein thrombosis in the leg include:

- Swelling
- Pain
- Tenderness and redness, particularly at the back of your leg below the knee

Please report any of the above symptoms to your midwife or doctor immediately.

Ultrasound Scans

The use of ultrasound to assess the wellbeing of the fetus in the womb is an established part of antenatal care. Scans are routinely performed at approx 12 weeks of pregnancy and approx 20 weeks of pregnancy. The accuracy of modern ultrasound is very good. This is not always the case with obese women. The presence of excess fat tissue on the abdomen means the quality of the images obtained is not as good. This increases the risk of missing abnormalities with the baby especially those of the heart and spine.

If you have a BMI of 40 or more you will also be offered scans at 28 and 34 weeks to estimate the size and position as physical examination may be less reliable.

How does your BMI affect labour?

Women who have a high BMI may experience more difficulties in labour, however, many have no problems. Women who have a high BMI are at increased risk of having:

- An induction of labour
- A longer labour
- A Caesarean section
- Larger babies and difficult delivery of the baby's shoulders
- Breathing difficulties with your baby when born
- Heavy bleeding after the baby is born
- Problems having epidurals and drips inserted