Weight Gain in Pregnancy

Weight gain (including fat storage) is a natural biological process during pregnancy. Some people can find the changes in the number on the scale distressing, so it is important to remember that weight gain is appropriate and necessary.

Factors that contribute to weight gain include:
- **Your baby** (~3-3.6kg)
- **The placenta and amniotic fluid** (~1.5kg)
- **Uterine muscles** (~1kg)
- **Increased blood volume** (~1.4-1.8kg)
- **Fluid retention** (~1-1.5kg)
- **Breast tissue** (~0.5-1kg)
- **Fat storage for breastfeeding** (~2.7-3.6kg)

At times the number on the scale can increase rapidly. This is due to normal growth fluctuations and hormonal changes. It’s especially important to maintain adequate water intake to avoid dehydration and rebound swelling as the body seeks to secure nutritional resources.

Exposure to Triggers

Even people who have recently recovered from their eating disorder may be triggered when they are pregnant. This can be due to:
- Changes in body shape, in addition to increasing weight, which some people find difficult to accept.
- Other people (even strangers!) thinking that it’s ok to comment on and touch a pregnant woman’s body.
- Cravings and physical drives to eat more, which may trigger urges to overeat or binge.
- Morning sickness which may involve vomiting or food aversions similar to disordered eating behaviours.
- Having to limit exercise - pregnant women are recommended to do only a moderate amount of aerobic exercise, and some activities are not advised.

It is important that women who are pregnant (or hope to become pregnant) access support so they can prepare for any challenges they may face. Many women with eating disorders cope well with pregnancy, and even reduce or cease their eating disordered behaviours. However, it’s still important to seek support as it’s common for an increase in eating disordered thoughts and behaviours to occur after the baby is born. A healthcare professional with experience in eating disorders can offer assistance.

Developed in conjunction with Kate Fleming, Dietician

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