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Prenatal Nutrition

Big Mama: Plus-Size Pregnancy
Carrying some extra weight? Here's what you can do to have a healthy pregnancy

By Wendy Haaf

A biological clock that's quickly running down. A missed Pill, or a sperm that pole-vaults the diaphragm. Whatever the reason, many of us get pregnant at a less-than-perfect time, before we've attained financial stability, a solid relationship — or a healthy weight. And since more than one in five Canadian women of childbearing age has a weight problem, a growing number find themselves in Andrea Rowland's shoes.

The Innisfail, Alta., mom who is expecting her second child began both her pregnancies well above her ideal weight. Andrea's first baby had to be delivered early because he stopped growing normally, and she knows her size increases her chances of encountering complications again. "I am concerned about how my weight will affect this pregnancy," she says.

In this situation, a woman's worries often loom out of proportion to her real risks, according to Brette McWhorter Sember, co-author of *Your Plus-Size Pregnancy: The Ultimate Guide for the Full-Figured Expectant Mom*. "I think some recent studies have been reported in a skewed way in the media, which has made women more worried than they need to be." While Sember acknowledges that larger-sized women face somewhat higher risks, she adds an important qualifier: "Most have healthy pregnancies and perfect babies."

With that fact firmly in mind, here's a look at what to do to keep you and your baby as healthy as possible.

Defining overweight

First, where do researchers, caregivers and doctors draw the line between optimal weight and overweight when it comes to pregnancy? "It's based on pre-pregnancy status," explains David Young, professor and chair of obstetrics and gynaecology at Dalhousie University in Halifax. "There are different definitions, but it's usually related to the body mass index (BMI)," a number that takes into account both a woman's weight and her height. Many researchers use this measurement when studying the relationship between body size and health problems. (To calculate yours, click [here](#)).

"Once your pre-pregnancy BMI falls into the overweight category, your risks start to go up," Sember explains, "and they increase with how overweight you are."

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