

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Raised body mass index (BMI) and pregnancy

This leaflet gives information about the challenges of being overweight in pregnancy and how it affects your care. You have been given this leaflet because your BMI is 30 or greater.

When you first see your midwife, you will be weighed, your height measured, and your BMI calculated.

What does my BMI mean?

BMI	Weight status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5 - 24.9	Normal
25.0 - 29.9	Overweight
30.0 - 39.9	Obese
40 and above	Morbidly obese

Why use BMI in pregnancy?

BMI can show the effect body weight has on health. As BMI increases, so does the risk of some illnesses.

Most women with a raised BMI will have a straightforward pregnancy and healthy babies. However, research shows that if you have a raised BMI at the start of pregnancy you are more at risk of problems during pregnancy, labour and after the birth.

What are the risks?

During pregnancy:

- Being overweight is associated with putting added strain on your joints, muscles, heart, and lungs. This can cause joint and back pain, tiredness, and shortness of breath.

- It can increase the risks of developing blood clots (thrombosis), which can be life-threatening.
- You may also have an increased risk of developing gestational diabetes, high blood pressure and pre-eclampsia.
- A raised BMI increases the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, neural tube defects (congenital conditions affecting the brain, spine, or spinal cord), and having a baby weighing over 4kg. A higher birth weight increases the risk of complications for both you and your baby during birth.
- Ultrasound scans may be uncomfortable due to the added pressure placed on your abdomen during the scan. Ultrasound scans are less accurate at detecting problems if your BMI is raised.
- Performing amniocentesis or chorionic villus test (offered if you have a high chance antenatal screening result) may be more difficult.
- Midwives and doctors may have more difficulty feeling how well your baby is growing, what position your baby is lying in and hearing your baby's heartbeat.
- You may find it more difficult to feel your baby's movements.

Labour and giving birth

There is an increased risk of complications during labour and birth, particularly if your BMI is 40 or more:

- Your baby may be born preterm (before 37 weeks).
- A longer labour.
- Your baby's shoulder becoming 'stuck' during birth (shoulder dystocia).

- An emergency Caesarean birth, which are more difficult if your BMI is significantly raised.
- It may be more difficult to monitor your baby's heartbeat during labour. This could lead to further interventions or increase your risk of operative delivery if we are unable to maintain effective fetal monitoring to determine fetal wellbeing.
- You may have problems moving around in labour.
- Epidural and spinal anaesthetics are more difficult to perform.
- It will be more difficult to give you a general anaesthetic if you need one.

After the birth:

- You are more prone to blood clotting problems, such as deep vein thrombosis.
- If you have stitches, they may not heal properly.
- If you have had a Caesarean section, your wound may not heal well.
- In the long term your baby is more prone to obesity problems.
- You may be more prone to diabetes or heart disease in later life.

What can be done to help?

Pre-pregnancy care:

- You should aim to conceive when you have a normal BMI. If you are already pregnant, it is something you should think about for future pregnancies. Your GP will be able to offer advice about healthy eating.

Care in pregnancy:

- It is not advisable to lose weight while you are pregnant, but you should eat healthily. We refer all women with a raised BMI to 'A Better Life'. This can support you in taking control of your health and wellbeing by providing high quality community leisure, health, and wellbeing services.
- Try not to put on too much weight, no more than 6kg. Eat well - five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, balanced with protein, fibre, and some dairy products.

Avoid fats, sugars, and processed foods. Drink plenty of water. Your midwife can give you further advice. Your GP may refer you to a dietitian for further support. More information can be found in The Pregnancy Book at [The Pregnancy Book | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](http://The%20Pregnancy%20Book%20|%20HSC%20Public%20Health%20Agency%20(hscni.net))

- Become more active. Simple exercise like walking and swimming are good. Try to do 30 minutes of gentle to moderate exercise five times a week.
- Your blood pressure will be monitored regularly using the right sized cuff for you.
- A test for diabetes – glucose tolerance test (GTT) – is offered at 25 weeks of pregnancy. If you have diabetes, we will make you an appointment at the hospital. Your care will be with the maternity team.
- If your BMI is between 30 and 35 and you have no other factors which will affect your pregnancy, you can have midwifery-led care.
- If your BMI is 35 or more, you will be referred for maternity-team care and will need appointments at the hospital.
- If your BMI is 40 or more, an anaesthetist may need to see you. Together, you will plan for your pain-relief in labour, or anaesthetic if you need a Caesarean.
- Your BMI will be checked again when you are 34 weeks pregnant. We want to make sure you are getting the right care.

After the birth:

- Try to maintain your healthy eating plan.
- Breastfeeding will give your baby the ideal start to a healthy lifestyle and may also help you lose weight. Breastfeeding may also help prevent your child becoming overweight as they grow up.
- Enjoy being active with your baby. Simple exercises like walking and swimming are good. Try to do 30 minutes of gentle to moderate exercise five times a week.

Contact details

Your midwife, GP or health visitor can give you extra information.

Useful websites

You can also find more information on the following websites (type the link into your browser):

- <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/overweight/>

In addition, your Badgernet app will have leaflets for your information.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns, or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.pet@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.pet@nhs.net

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

To be completed by the Communications office
Leaflet code: PIL202601-07-BMIP
Created: September 2012/ Revised: January 2026 /
Review Date: January 2028