

# Pregnant women who are overweight put their infants at risk

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In recent years, there has been a large increase in the prevalence of overweight and obese women of childbearing age, with approximately 51% of non-pregnant women ages 20 to 39 being classified as overweight or obese.

A new article published in the journal *Nursing for Women's Health* finds that obesity in pregnant women is associated with [pregnancy complications](#), birth defects, as well as a greater risk of childhood and adult obesity in infants born to obese mothers.

Merrie Rebecca Walters, RN, and Julie Smith Taylor, PhD, RNC, WHNP-BC, reviewed the potential consequences of maternal obesity. Results show that [obese women](#) are more likely to have an infant with a neural tube defect, heart defects, or multiple anomalies than women with a normal BMI.

Obese pregnant women also put themselves at a higher risk of pregnancy complications, including gestational diabetes, hypertension, preeclampsia, induction of labor, cesarean delivery, and postpartum hemorrhage, compared with women with normal pregnancy body mass indexes.

Additionally, information from the article explains that obesity among pregnant mothers is linked to childhood obesity in their infants. Obesity during pregnancy more than doubles the risk of obesity in children at two to four years of age. Also, the risk of obesity in children born to obese mothers may extend into their adolescence, with the risk of obesity during adulthood being greater among obese children.

The article emphasizes the need for women to consult with their healthcare providers about what their ideal pre-conception weight should be. "Assisting women of childbearing age to achieve and maintain a healthful weight prior to conception will potentially minimize [health risks](#) to both

mothers and infants," the authors note.

Additionally, strategies for breaking the cycle of obesity include breastfeeding. Research has shown that mothers who breastfeed have a significantly higher weight loss than mothers who formula feed from 1 to 12 months postpartum. Also, breastfeeding may be beneficial in reducing excessive weight gain in infants, therefore reducing the risk of future childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes.

"Health care providers must recognize the association between maternal obesity and [childhood obesity](#) and work to break the cycle of obesity before it becomes the leading cause of mortality in the United States."

Provided by Wiley

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