

Pregnancy-related weight gain higher among low-income minority women, study finds

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A new study by the Yale School of Public Health finds that excessive weight gain during pregnancy and inadequate postpartum weight loss are particularly prevalent among low-income, ethnic minority women. The study appears online in the journal *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*.

Patterns like this have important public health implications, including reduced growth for the fetus and greater likelihood of preterm delivery and injury during birth. Mothers who retain weight after giving birth are more likely than their peers to develop a range of serious health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes.

The study followed 427 women (ranging in age from 14 to 25 years old)

during their pregnancy through to 12 months postpartum. The researchers found that 62 percent of the women— particularly those who were already overweight or obese—exceeded the maximum recommended [weight gain](#). Only 22 percent of the women gained weight within recommended guidelines.

Postpartum, the study found that one-third of the participants had a higher body mass index (BMI) one year after giving birth and that 68 percent were either overweight or obese. The study also found a noticeable shift toward obesity. Five percent of the women classified as having normal weight and 53 percent of those classified as overweight before pregnancy were classified as obese one-year postpartum. The authors note that a shift in body mass index that is seen after just one pregnancy is likely to be compounded with future pregnancies.

“Rates of overweight and obesity have increased dramatically in the United States and abroad. For childbearing women, obesity and excessive weight gain can result in serious adverse health outcomes for both mother and baby,” said Jeannette Ickovics, a professor at the School of Public Health and the paper’s senior author. “Pregnancy is a pivotal point for weight management. To promote good health, we must consider pregnancy a ‘window of opportunity’ for interventions to improve weight management and reduce the shift towards obesity.”

The Institute of Medicine released guidelines in 2009 on healthy levels of weight gain for pregnant women. They recommend that women who are considered underweight at the onset of their [pregnancy](#) gain no more than 40 pounds; that woman who are overweight gain no more than 25 pounds; and that [women](#) who are obese limit their overall weight gain to 20 pounds.

Provided by Yale University

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