



Photo: Alloy Photography

Healthy weight gain in pregnancy helps moms and babies avoid a variety of health risks.

**Pregnancy is a** time to nourish yourself and your growing baby—but research shows that gaining too much weight can be unhealthy for both of you.

The Promoting Appropriate Maternal Body Weight in Pregnancy and Postpartum through Healthy Dietary Intake study will look at how women in Alberta eat during pregnancy and how health-care

providers can support healthy eating and appropriate weight gain.

The study will receive up to \$2.5 million from the Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions' Collaborative Research and Innovative Opportunities program grant.

Leading the study are Rhonda Bell, professor of human nutrition at the University of Alberta, Linda McCargar, a registered dietitian and professor

## Study looks at women's weight gain during pregnancy

Researchers strive to find ways to support expecting moms

of human nutrition at the U of A, and Paula Robson, adjunct professor at the U of A and a research scientist with Alberta Health Services.

"Pregnancy is a significant risk factor for extra weight gain," Bell says. "Women can gain too much weight during pregnancy and keep that weight after the baby is born."

About half of all pregnant women in the country gain more weight than is

recommended by Health Canada.

Extra weight during pregnancy can increase a woman's risk of developing diabetes during pregnancy, hypertension and cardiovascular disease later in life. It can also increase discomfort, seriously complicate labour and make it more difficult to lose weight after giving birth.

In babies, extra weight can impair brain development and increase the risk of weight gain and obesity later in life.

Unhealthy weight gain in pregnancy has a number of causes, from giving into cravings to a culture that encourages pregnant women to eat.

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"Women can feel pressure to eat," says Bell. "The foods that are offered, or eaten during a craving, can be unhealthy foods that are low in nutrients and contain extra calories, particularly in the form of sugar and fat. We recommend that women eat foods that are in *Canada's Food Guide*, and meet their calorie needs."

Pregnant women can avoid gaining too much weight with any number of activities, such as regular walking, modified yoga and even reading.

"It's good for pregnant women to exercise without overexerting themselves," Bell says. "What's most important is to adopt healthy behaviours during pregnancy that can support you, your baby and healthy weight gain." **a**

— Jacqueline Louie with files from Amy Sawchenko

**\* For more about pregnancy and healthy weight, search for these topics at [applemag.ca](http://applemag.ca).**

### Health Canada's weight-gain guidelines

Healthy weight gain during pregnancy depends, to some extent, on your weight before pregnancy.

Pre-pregnancy category*	Recommended Range of total weight gain	
	lb	kg
Underweight	28-40	12.5-18
Normal weight	25-35	11.5-16
Overweight	15-25	7-11.5
Obese	11-20	5-9

\*Pre-pregnancy categories are based on Body Mass Index (BMI) scale.



### Eating healthy

Eating a nutritious and balanced diet, among other things, can be one way to maintain a healthy weight throughout life, including during pregnancy. Health Canada recommends women aged 19 to 50 eat eight to 10 servings of fruit and vegetables, eight servings of grains and two servings each of milk and alternatives and meat and alternatives a day.

*Canada's Food Guide* says pregnant women may need to eat an extra two to three servings a day of foods including:

- Fruit such as apples, bananas
- Vegetables such as carrots and celery
- Hard boiled eggs
- Almonds and other nuts
- Yogurt
- Milk.

What does a serving size look like?

- 1 cup (250 ml) dark, leafy greens is a serving of vegetables
- 1/2 cup (125 ml) pure orange juice equals one serving of fruit
- 1.6 oz (45 g) bagel or 1/2 cup (125 ml) pasta equals one serving of grain products
- 1 cup (250 ml) milk or fortified soy or 1.8 oz (50 g) of cheese equals one serving of milk and alternatives
- 2.6 oz. (75 g) of lean meat, poultry or fish (about the size of a deck of cards) equals one serving of meat and alternatives.

**\* For more healthy eating tips, talk with a dietitian or visit [albertahealthservices.ca](http://albertahealthservices.ca) and search for healthy eating starts here.**

