

Obesity A Weighty Concern For Health Of Mums-To-Be

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Pregnant women — Put down that extra doughnut. Experts are warning that “eating for two” doesn’t mean eating twice as much food anymore. As Americans continue to get heavier, health care increasingly is focusing on the effects of obesity and excessive weight gain before, during and after pregnancy.

“The No. 1 concern of ob-gyns today in pregnant women is obesity,” said Dr. Vivian von Gruenigen, director of women’s health services for Summa Health System. “The problem is that obese women can have higher complications in their pregnancies. In addition, it’s a marker for their cardiovascular disease in the future.”

A national Institute of Medicine committee last year issued the first revised recommendations for weight gain during pregnancy in nearly two decades. The guidelines say women who are considered overweight (based on a body-mass index, or BMI, of 25 to 29.9) should gain between 15 and 25 pounds. Those who are obese (with a BMI of 30 or higher) are encouraged to limit weight gain to 11 to 20 pounds.

Women who start off obese have higher rates of complications — particularly gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, Caesarean sections, neural tube defects and larger babies weighing 10 pounds or more, said Dr. Angela Silber, a high-risk obstetrician at Akron Children’s Hospital’s Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine. It’s a common concern.

Among women ages 20 to 39 — prime childbirth years — about one-third are obese, said Karen Gil, senior research scientist in obstetrics and gynecology at Akron General Medical Center. “The obesity status for a woman, even before she gets pregnant, is the biggest risk factor,” said Dr. Patrick Catalano, chairman of obstetrics and gynecology at MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland. Catalano served on the National Institute of Medicine committee that developed the revised guidelines for weight gain during pregnancy.

Obese women who exceed the recommended weight gain are more likely to keep the excessive weight after delivery, he said. The cumulative effect after one or more pregnancies can mean an overweight woman becomes obese or a slightly obese woman ends up with a higher BMI and more health problems.

For the average 7 1/2-pound baby, mothers also gain 1.3 pounds from the placenta, 1.8 pounds in amniotic fluid, 2.2 pounds from the uterus, almost a pound in breast growth, 2.6 pounds in blood, 3.7 pounds in water and 7.3 pounds of fat, according to Silber.

Patients with a higher amount of body fat can limit weight to the recommended levels without harming the baby, she said. “As long as the baby is growing, it’s not detrimental.”

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