

Background

Obesity is a significant health issue for women during pregnancy, childbirth and in the postnatal period.

Pregnant women who are overweight or obese i.e. those with a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 30kg/m², have a recognised increased risk of developing complications during pregnancy and birth. The level of obesity in pregnancy is directly related to the incidence of complications.

Close monitoring and assessment of overweight or obese pregnant women will help reduce complications and optimise the health of both the woman and her baby.

Specialist care and equipment is required to provide the most appropriate assessment and care of pregnant women who are overweight or obese. Not all maternity units in South Australia are able to provide specialist perinatal care.

Planning your care

Your BMI will be determined at your first antenatal visit, when your Medical Officer or Midwife will discuss with you this measurement in relation to the safest options for where your antenatal care should be provided and where the birth of your baby should occur.

If your BMI is greater than 30 kg/m² your Medical Officer /Midwife will develop a special plan of care with you that will cover your antenatal care, birth of your baby and your postnatal care. This plan is often developed in consultation with specialists at Level 4, 5, or 6 public metropolitan maternity units.

Possible complications related to obesity in pregnancy

If you are obese during pregnancy you are at an increased risk of developing complications that may affect you or your baby's health during the pregnancy, birth or in the postnatal period.

Some of these complications include:

- > High blood pressure
- > Diabetes
- > Respiratory infections
- > Blood clots—thrombo-embolic disease
- > Pre-eclampsia
- > Anaesthetic difficulties
- > Requiring a caesarean section birth
- > Stillbirth
- > Congenital abnormalities
- > Preterm infant
- > Asphyxia in the infant
- > Birth trauma to the infant
- > Hypoglycaemic infant
- > Large infant

Safe care for obese pregnant women

If your BMI is greater than 40kg/m² your antenatal care will require careful management. A Specialist Anaesthetist and Specialist Obstetrician will be consulted regarding the best possible options for your care during pregnancy and birth of your baby.

If your BMI is greater than 45kg/m² your antenatal care will be transferred to a Specialist Obstetrician and Specialist Anaesthetist at one of the public metropolitan maternity units to ensure the best possible outcome for you and your baby. You will **only** be permitted to birth at one of the public metropolitan maternity units which are specifically staffed and equipped to provide this specialist care. A perinatal management plan will be developed with you prior to your 34 week gestation and you will be directed to reside, prior to the completion of your 36 week gestation, within 150kms of the maternity unit where you are booked to birth.

If your BMI is greater than 60kg/m² or you weigh more than 170kgs your pregnancy care will immediately be transferred to a public metropolitan maternity unit that has an onsite intensive care unit and access to more specialist care and where plans will be made for you to birth. You will be required to reside prior to the completion of your 36 week gestation, at location of your choice within 150kms of the maternity unit where you are booked to birth.

Important to note

Having a baby when you are overweight or obese carries extra risk. The safety of you and your baby is paramount when planning for your antenatal care and where you should labour and birth your baby.

It is important to attend the planned antenatal checkups with your doctor or obstetrician and seek advice from these or other health professionals.

If you are assessed as overweight or obese during your pregnancy you can expect to be scheduled additional visits with your Medical Officer or Midwife. Referrals to other medical and health specialists such as an Obstetrician, Anaesthetists and dieticians should also be anticipated.

If you have a BMI greater than 45kg/m² and live in the regional areas of South Australia, arrangements will be made with you to plan the transfer of your care prior to 34 weeks gestation. Arrangements will be made for you to birth in a public metropolitan maternity unit, that is equipped to safely manage your pregnancy and the birth of your baby. Planning ahead is important to enable you to receive the most appropriate care and to secure the specialist appointments required to ensure the best health outcomes for you and your baby. You will be required to relocate closer, prior to the completion of your 36 week gestation, to a maternity unit that is equipped to provide your specialist care. The Medical Officer or Midwife managing your pregnancy will discuss these arrangements with you.

Specialist care required for obese pregnant women

If you are obese during pregnancy you will be referred to any of the following health professionals who will help you reduce the risk of developing complications during the pregnancy, birth or the postnatal period.

- > Specialist Anaesthetist
- > Specialist Obstetrician
- > Dietician
- > Maternal Fetal Medicine Consultant
- > Radiographer
- > Physiotherapist

For more information

Women's and Children's Health Network

**Alan Campbell Building
72 King William Road
North Adelaide SA 5006
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/perinatal**

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call The Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

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Patient information
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