

Weight changes during Pregnancy

What are the problems associated with a high BMI during pregnancy

Most pregnant women who have a high BMI can expect to enjoy a healthy pregnancy. However, having a raised BMI increases the chance of complications for both you and your baby. The higher your BMI, the higher the risks.

As your BMI increases, so does the likelihood of one or more of the following problems occurring:

- A blood clot in the leg (deep vein thrombosis) or in your lungs (pulmonary embolism)
- Gestational diabetes, a form of diabetes that develops during pregnancy
- High blood pressure and pre-eclampsia
- Difficulties with some procedures – a high BMI can make it difficult to monitor your baby's heartbeat, or to view certain problems with the baby's organs on an ultrasound scan, or to give you an epidural.

The problems for your baby associated with a high BMI include:

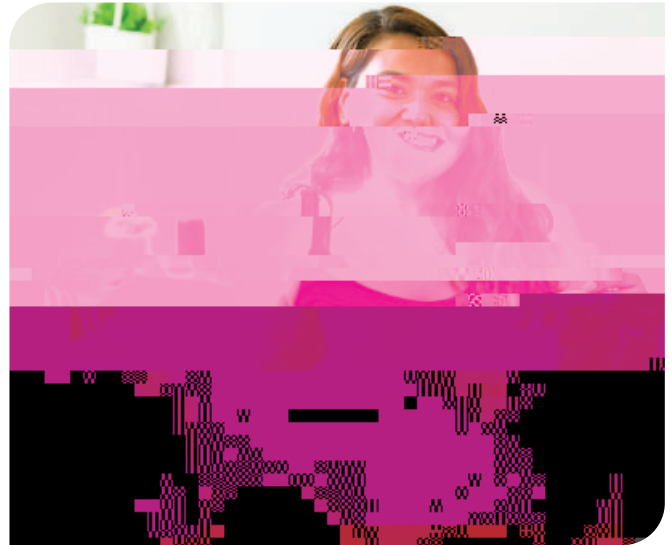
- Problems with the development of the baby's brain and spine (neural tube defects)
- Higher rate of miscarriage
- Higher rate of premature birth
- A birth weight greater than 4kg
- Admission to a special care nursery
- Higher rate of stillbirth
- Increased chance of obesity and diabetes later in life.

What are the problems associated with a high BMI during labour and birth

There is an increased risk of complications during labour and birth, particularly if you have a BMI above 40. If your BMI is above 40 you may need to have your baby at a hospital with the appropriate facilities and experienced clinicians to provide the specialised care that meets your needs.

Some of the problems include:

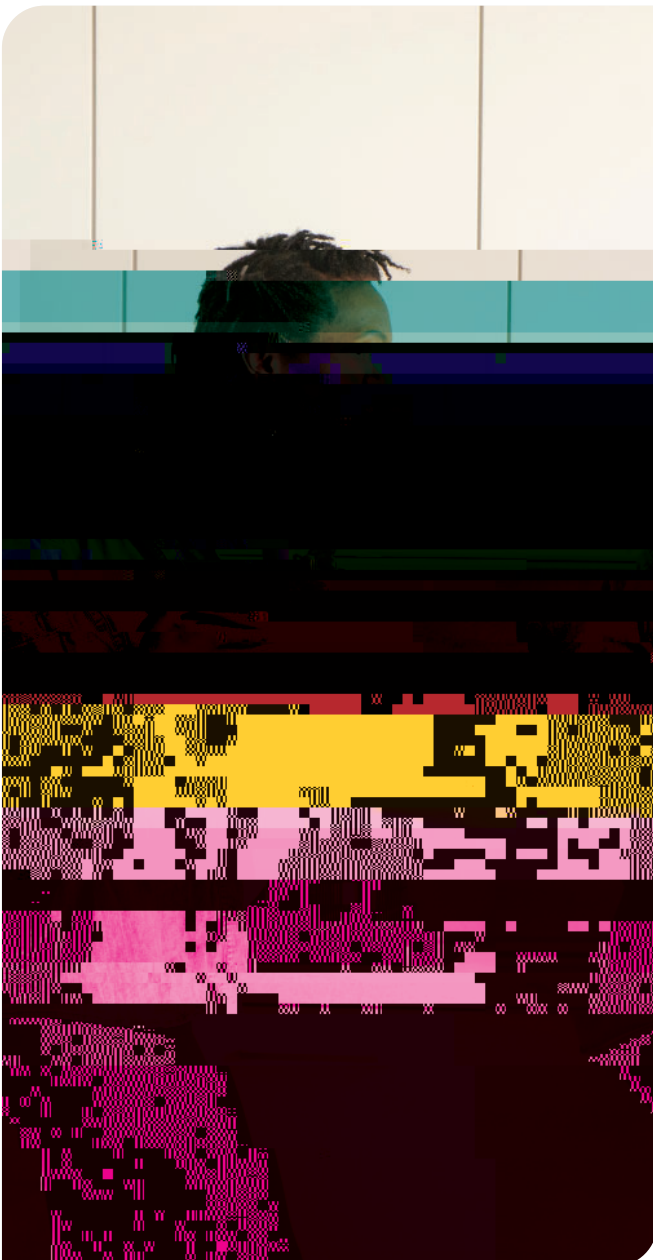
- Your baby being born prematurely (before 37 weeks)
- Difficulty monitoring the baby's heartbeat
- Anaesthetic complications
- Greater likelihood of requiring an emergency caesarean section



- Shoulder dystocia (when the baby's head is born, but the shoulders do not come out. The doctor or midwife will take steps to help the shoulders to be born)
- Heavy bleeding after birth (postpartum haemorrhage).

Because of these possible complications, you should have a discussion with your obstetrician or midwife about the safest place to give birth.





How can the chance of having these problems be reduced

Despite having a high BMI, you can still have a healthy pregnancy through careful management of your weight, attention to diet and exercise, regular antenatal care to monitor for complications, and special considerations for your labour and baby's birth.

Your doctors and midwives may recommend one or more of the following (especially if you have a BMI above 40) to achieve the best possible pregnancy outcome for you and your baby:

- Referral to a specialist antenatal clinic
- Referral to a dietician
- Referral to the anaesthetist
- Low dose aspirin (100mg) and calcium (1500-2000mg) to reduce the chance of preeclampsia
- Extra ultrasound scans to monitor your baby's growth
- Early testing for gestational diabetes during pregnancy

By working together with your healthcare team, the chance of having complications can be reduced for both you and your baby. A healthy diet and regular exercise have long term benefits. Simple tips to help you plan a healthy meal:

- base your meals around vegetables with a side of lean protein and a side of starch (bread, pasta, rice etc)
- consume mostly wholegrain foods
- avoid processed, packaged foods such as fast food and soft drinks
- aim to eat at least two fresh fruits daily. Limit fruit juice.
- The RANZCOG website provides further information about exercise during pregnancy: <https://ranzocg.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Exercise-during-pregnancy-pamphlet.pdf>

