

Fertility and a woman's weight

If you're trying to get pregnant, or intend to start trying, know that being overweight – especially significantly so – can affect your chances of conceiving and having a healthy baby. If you are overweight and planning to get pregnant in the next year or few years, you might commit to a healthy eating and regular exercise plan. Losing even a few kilos can make a difference.

How can I tell if I'm 'overweight' or 'obese'?

One common measure of whether a person is 'overweight' or 'obese' is the body mass index or BMI. You calculate your BMI by dividing your weight in kilograms by the square of your height in meters. A healthy BMI is considered to be between 18.5 and 25. Having a BMI between 26 and 30 is considered 'overweight' and over 30 is considered 'obese'.

The facts about women, weight and fertility

Obesity can affect fertility by causing hormonal imbalances and problems with ovulation, particularly for women having their first baby. Obesity is associated with [polycystic ovary syndrome](#) (PCOS), a common cause of infertility. If a mother is obese, it increases the risk of pregnancy complications and health problems for the baby. [Risks associated with obesity in pregnancy](#) include hypertension, [pre-eclampsia](#), gestational [diabetes](#), infection, thromboembolic disease, need for induction of labour, Caesarean birth and stillbirth.

Babies born to overweight or obese mothers are more likely than those born to healthy-weight mothers to become obese children and adults, and to have more health problems.

The figures about women, weight and fertility

- Women who are overweight or obese have less chance of getting pregnant overall. They are also more likely than women of healthy weight to take more than a year to get pregnant.
- The risk of pre-eclampsia doubles in overweight women and triples in obese women. Overweight women have twice the risk of [gestational \(pregnancy-related\) diabetes](#) and obese women eight times the risk, compared with women of healthy weight.
- A woman who is obese is more than twice as likely to have a miscarriage as a woman of healthy weight. There is twice the risk that her baby will not survive.

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- Infants born to obese women are more likely to be large for their age, need neonatal intensive care or have a congenital abnormality.

Being underweight and fertility

Being underweight can also reduce a woman's fertility. It can cause hormone imbalances that affect ovulation and therefore a woman's chance of getting pregnant. Compared to healthy weight women, underweight women are more than twice as likely to take more than a year to get pregnant. Having a BMI under 18.5 is considered 'underweight'.