



High Risk Pregnancy – Elevated BMI

Your pregnancy has been identified as “High Risk” because when you became pregnant, your Body Mass Index, or “BMI”, was 40 or greater. BMI is calculated for each patient using a chart with your height and initial weight—see the other side of this sheet. This teaching sheet will discuss the increased risks for you and your baby during pregnancy that can be related to obesity.

When a woman begins a pregnancy with a BMI of 40 or greater, there are increased burdens placed on her body that can complicate a pregnancy. The main risks to you and your baby are:

- Gestational diabetes.
- High blood pressure and possible Pre-Eclampsia.
- A very large or very small baby.
- A prolonged or difficult labor and delivery.
- Increased likelihood of Cesarean-section delivery.
- Difficulty with abdominal wound healing if you have a Cesarean section.

Your progress throughout pregnancy will be monitored more closely, and this may involve extra and more frequent blood tests and more appointments with your doctor or midwife than women with low risk pregnancies generally have.

It is very important for you to limit your total pregnancy weight gain to 15 pounds or less, as your caloric needs are less in pregnancy than for women of average weight. Later in pregnancy, your doctor or midwife may wish to perform extra ultrasounds and fetal heart rate monitoring to assess your baby's growth and well being before birth.

Labor is often longer and more difficult for women with a higher BMI. Because of this, it is important to know what you can expect during your birth experience. You may need to have internal fetal heart rate and contraction monitors, as the external monitors may not be adequate for assessing how your baby is tolerating labor. The pushing stage of labor may be longer than usual, and will require your best effort to deliver vaginally. It is important to try for a vaginal delivery, as it is safer for you, and the recovery process is much easier than after a Cesarean section.

We understand that discussing a woman's weight and weight gain during pregnancy are very sensitive subjects. We hope that this information will be helpful to you in understanding the special management of your care during a high-risk pregnancy.