Background

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

Pregnant women who are overweight or obese 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.

SA Health has some maternity units with specialist facilities and staff available to manage the care of the obese woman during pregnancy and the postpartum period.

Planning your care

At your first antenatal visit your Medical Officer or Midwife will determine your BMI (Body Mass Index, which is a relationship between your height and your weight) and discuss the safest options for where your antenatal care should be provided and where the birth of your baby should be managed.

If your Medical Officer /Midwife assesses you as obese he/she will develop a special plan of care with you that will cover your antenatal care, birth of your baby and your postnatal care.

Definition of obese

Those with a BMI greater than 30kg/m².

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 or birth.

Some of the more common complications related to being overweight or obese in pregnancy are:

> High blood pressure
> Diabetes
> Respiratory infections
> Blood clots—thrombo-embolic disease
> Pre-eclampsia
> Anaesthetic problems
> Requiring a caesarean section birth
> Stillbirth

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

Safe care for obese pregnant women

If your BMI (Body Mass Index) is greater than 40kg/m² your antenatal care will require careful management. A Specialist Anaesthetist and Specialist Obstetrician may 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. You are advised to reside within 150kms of the maternity unit where you are booked to birth. If you reside in a location outside this distance, your Specialist Obstetrician will advise you as to the best time to relocate closer to the maternity unit where you are booked to birth.

If your BMI is greater than 60kg/m² or you weigh more than 170kgs your care will be transferred to a metropolitan public maternity unit that an onsite intensive care unit and access to more specialist care.
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 health professionals whenever you need to.

During your pregnancy additional visits to your Medical Officer or Midwife can be expected and referrals to other medical and health specialists such as an Obstetrician, Anaesthetists and dieticians should be anticipated.

If you live in the regional areas of South Australia, arrangements may need to be made for you to birth in a 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.

In your pregnancy, you may be required to relocate closer 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.

Disclaimer

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For more information

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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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