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**LIFE-LONG OBESITY RISK OF 'EATING FOR TWO' IN** **PREGNANCY**  
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MOTHERS WON'T LOSE EXTRA WEIGHT, EXPERTSWARN

IT is advice that many an expectant mother will have heard as she settles down to a meal.

But 'eating for two' during pregnancy could leave women saddled with the extra pounds for life, researchers have found.

Pregnant women who gain excessive weight are at higher risk of obesity and health problems such as high blood pressure, later in life.

The findings, from a Bristol University study, add to mounting evidence about the harmful effects of being overweight during pregnancy.

Although weight gain during pregnancy is natural as the baby develops, research suggests that being fat puts baby and mother at risk.

The NHS advises that during the first six months of pregnancy, a woman's recommended energy intake of 1,940 calories a day does not change, so no extra food is required.

In the latter three months, the expectant mother needs only an additional 200 calories a day Ð equivalent to a ready-made fruit salad and yoghurt, or a small bowl of sugar-free muesli with grated apple.

The long-term Bristol study found that those who gained more than the recommended amount of weight during pregnancy were three times as likely to be overweight, obese or become 'apple-shaped' 16 years later.

But women who began pregnancy at a healthy weight and who gained only a little weight were much less likely to go on to become fat and develop related health problems.

The number of women who start their pregnancy obese has more than doubled in the past 20 years.

According to UK figures released last month, around 15 per cent of mothers are obese when expecting Ð up from seven per cent two decades earlier.

Doctors have warned that the problem is an ever-growing burden on the NHS and is jeopardising the health of the next generation.

Complications suffered by obese women in pregnancy range from diabetes to life-threatening pre-eclampsia, while babies born to fat women are at greater risk of diabetes and obesity.

Experts said the findings show the importance of being 'fit for pregnancy' Ð but they stressed that dieting was never recommended.

In the UK, there are no specific guidelines for how much weight a woman should gain during pregnancy.

The Bristol University team used U.S. advice to monitor 3,877 mothers in the west of England during pregnancy and again after 16 years.

Its results will be published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Body mass index Ð worked out using a person's weight relative to their height Ð was used to determine if a woman was fat when she fell pregnant.

A BMI of 18.5 is underweight, 18.5 to 25 is healthy, 25 to 30 is overweight, and over 30 is obese.

The findings showed women who were underweight before pregnancy weighed on average two stones more when they gave birth.

The advice was to gain a maximum of two stones 11lb.

Women of healthy weight put on two stones 5lb, on average, within the recommended limit of two-and-a-half stones.

Overweight women gained an average of one stone 12lb, busting the limit of one stone 11lb, while obese women gained one stone 8lb Ð over the limit of one stone 5lb.

Altogether, half of overweight and obese women ate more than recommended levels for their pre-pregnancy weight, compared with one in five who started at a healthy weight.

Study leader Dr Abigail Fraser said women should avoid over-eating, particularly in the first six months when extra weight was laid down as fat before the baby really needed it for growth.

Weight is currently recorded only when an expectant mother goes for her first antenatal check. More regular checks were abandoned in the 1990s.

Dr Fraser said: 'Our findings suggest that regular monitoring of weight in pregnancy may need to be reconsidered because it provides a window of opportunity to prevent health problems later in life.'

The most important take-home message for women is to attain a healthy weight before conceiving, she added.

'You don't need to eat for two in pregnancy because this will cause you problems in later life, and is also linked to a higher risk of your baby becoming obese in childhood.'

New mothers are increasingly isolated, with almost a third living more than 40 miles from their close family, a survey commissioned by the National Childbirth Trust found.

Nearly a quarter didn't know other parents in their area and more than half spent less time with old friends who were childless after they became mothers.

Sally Horrox, of the NCT, said the figures were 'incredibly worrying'.