Pregnant women can prevent excess weight gain with simple steps, study finds

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A new study reports that a low-cost healthy lifestyle program, including self-weighing weekly or monthly, by pregnant women with pre-existing overweight can prevent them from gaining too much weight during early pregnancy. The researchers will present the results Sunday at The Endocrine Society's 93rd Annual Meeting in Boston.

"Preventing excess weight gain in pregnancy is essential to the health of all mothers and their babies and can be achieved by increasing awareness [of weight during pregnancy] and by simple health messages, behavior change strategies, and regular monitoring of weight gain," said lead author Catherine Lombard, PhD, of the Monash University School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Melbourne, Australia.

"This weight-management strategy has the potential to reduce pregnancy complications, such as gestational diabetes, and birth complications," Lombard said.

The clinical trial consisted of more than 200 overweight women, recruited from a hospital-based clinic, who were less than 15 weeks pregnant. All women were at high risk of developing gestational diabetes (pregnancy-related diabetes) because of their age, weight, ethnicity, previous gestational diabetes or a family history of diabetes. They were randomly assigned to the intervention group (106 women) or control group (99 women).

At 14 weeks of pregnancy, both groups received health information

emphasizing making small, healthy changes to eating and physical activity, such as walking and eating more fruit and vegetables. The intervention group also received information about how much weight they should gain during pregnancy, an instruction to weigh themselves weekly or monthly and frequent reminders by text messaging. The control group received no instruction or reminders to self-weigh. Both groups received standard prenatal care.

Measures included weight, frequency of self-weighing, physical activity and food intake at the beginning of the study and at 28 weeks of pregnancy. This is the time that routine testing for gestational diabetes occurs, according to Lombard.

At 28 weeks regular self-weighing was associated with significantly less pregnancy weight gain for intervention participants than for the control participants—12.6 pounds versus 15.7 pounds, respectively. Women in both groups who did not self-weigh gained a similar amount of weight: an average of 15.2 pounds.

"We conclude," Lombard said, "that self-weighing keeps women focused on their behavior. When it is paired with a simple self-management intervention to prevent excess weight gain, it has a significant impact on weight gain in high-risk pregnancies."

Provided by The Endocrine Society

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