Should mothers be eating for two during pregnancy?

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ONE of the most common assumptions about pregnancy is that the expectant mother should be "eating for two".



But is this traditional piece of advice true?

As a general rule, we can say that eating double portions during pregnancy is not only unnecessary, but also potentially harmful.

In fact, eating excessively and being overweight not only increases the risk of disease among the general population, but in the case of pregnant women, it also increases the risk of complications for both the mother and the baby.

So, how much weight should you be putting on during your pregnancy?

*11-16 kg is considered a healthy weight gain for women with a normal weight during a single pregnancy

*If you were overweight or obese before the pregnancy, you should target a lower weight gain, around 7-10 kg, depending on how much extra weight you had to begin with

*Women who are underweight should gain around 13-18 kg and it would be good to talk to your dietitian to make sure you follow a meal plan which is nutritious and ensures that you gain enough weight for your body to be able to sustain a healthy pregnancy

But shouldn't eating a lot be good for the baby to grow well?

While it's true that expectant mothers should make sure to get enough calories and nutrients for themselves and their babies, this doesn't mean that overeating - or, worse, eating plenty of unhealthy foods - is a good idea.

Why not? Because overeating, unhealthy diets and excessive weight gain are all risk factors not only for the general population, but also for pregnant women.

The main risks for the expecting mum and the baby associated with being overweight or obese are the following:
- increased risk of pregnancy loss (miscarriage or stillbirth) or foetal abnormalities
- increased risk of needing a caesarean section (a surgical procedure to deliver the baby) instead of the natural, vaginal birth
- gestational diabetes (a type of diabetes developed during the pregnancy)
- high blood pressure and a potentially serious condition called preeclampsia
- increased tiredness, mobility problems and body aches. Chances are that you'll already experience some (if not all) of these issues during your pregnancy, so being overweight will make them even worse and will put even more pressure on your body during a time when all its efforts should be directed towards sustaining the baby's healthy growth instead.

In the next article we'll talk more in detail about diet during pregnancy and how you should increase the amount of calories and nutrients during the different trimesters.

For now, we can say that your priority should be to focus on having a healthy diet rich in nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and starchy crops, nuts and seeds and lean protein (don't forget beans, chickpeas, lentils and dhal!).

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