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1602 HUNTINGDON PIKE • MEADOWBROOK, PA 19006
215-938-3226 • 215-938-3232 FAX

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Contact: Grace Roche

215-938-3227

groche@holyredeemer.com

Plus-size and pregnant: Holy Redeemer obstetrician advises women to shed extra weight before conceiving

(MEADOWBROOK, PA) – It used to be that women worried about losing “baby weight” as quickly as possible after delivery. But with the nation’s current obesity epidemic, it’s not just about losing weight *after* baby anymore. It’s now about losing weight *before* baby too.

“Once you conceive, any unhealthy weight can make carrying a baby more difficult and risky,” says Dr. May-ange Ntoso, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Holy Redeemer Hospital and Medical Center. “There is a clear link between obesity and pregnancy complications – like gestational diabetes, high blood pressure and prolonged labor – all of which can have an adverse effect on the health of mom and baby.”

Today, one in three pregnant women is considered obese – having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or more. And half of women of childbearing age are considered overweight – having a BMI of 25 to 29.9. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ranks being overweight or obese during pregnancy nearly at the same risk level as uncontrolled high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking or drinking alcohol.

That’s why Dr. Ntoso says it’s important that plus-size women lose some of their excess weight before conceiving. “It’s unsafe to diet while pregnant because developing babies need the proper nutrients to grow strong and healthy. So I urge plus-size women to lose weight prior to conceiving. It’s the best thing they can do for their health and that of their developing babies.”

In addition to gestational diabetes and high blood pressure, plus-size women must also consider that by failing to lose the additional pounds, they may have a more difficult time conceiving, have an increased risk of miscarriage, may deliver a big baby, require a caesarean section, deliver prematurely, develop preeclampsia and have more difficulty losing the extra “baby” weight post-pregnancy.

Obesity also changes the amount of weight a pregnant woman should gain. “The amount of recommended weight gain during pregnancy depends on a woman’s weight when she became pregnant,” Dr. Ntoso says. “A woman of average weight before pregnancy should gain 25 to 35 pounds during pregnancy. Overweight women may need to gain only 15 to 25 pounds during pregnancy.”

However, the weight guidelines may be changing for overweight women. The Institute of Medicine recently announced it is considering revising its weight guidelines for pregnant women based on a study recently published in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

The study found that obese women can gain little or no weight during pregnancy without harming their babies. In fact, the study showed that obese mothers who put on less than the recommended 15 pounds were less likely to develop pregnancy-related high blood pressure or deliver by caesarean section and more likely to have a normal-weight baby.

For plus-size women who are planning a pregnancy or who are already pregnant, Dr. Ntoso offers the following tips:

- Eat a balanced diet low in sugars and saturated fats
- Get moderate exercise with low-impact activities like walking or swimming
- Make an appointment with a nutritionist
- Lose weight after birth to avoid problems with any future pregnancies

“While the majority of plus-size women have completely normal pregnancies and healthy babies, it’s best to lose weight before conceiving to lower the risk of any potential problems or complications,” she adds. “What’s more, you can set a good example for your child in the future by maintaining a healthy weight.”

Delivering more than 3,000 babies each year, the Maternity Center at Holy Redeemer Hospital and Medical Center helps moms prepare for a healthy pregnancy and guides them through labor and delivery. We offer a highly trained, experienced staff of maternity specialists including board-certified obstetricians, anesthesiologists, maternal-fetal medicine specialists, pediatricians, neonatologists and maternal/newborn nurses. If needed, Holy Redeemer provides on-site perinatology, antenatal testing and neonatal intensive care units. And moms can sign up for an array of classes on pregnancy, childbirth preparation and infant care, as well as consult with a lactation specialist for assistance with breastfeeding. For more information or to make an appointment with a Holy Redeemer obstetrician, call 1-800-818-4747 or visit www.yourebeautifulbaby.com.

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