

Healthy Body Image Tips for Pregnant Women and New Mothers



National Eating Disorders Association

Adapted from *Does This Pregnancy Make Me Look Fat? The Essential Guide to Loving Your Body Before and After Baby* by Claire Mysko and Magali Amadei

Take Weight Out of the Equation

This might seem like a radical suggestion considering that pregnancy weight gain and post-baby weight loss are such hot topics of conversation among mothers-to-be and new moms. To add fuel to the fire, weigh-ins are often the center of every visit to the doctor. But truthfully, there really isn't any reason you need to keep track of your weight. If you know that it could become an unhealthy fixation, tell your OB or midwife that you prefer not to discuss the number unless it becomes a medical issue. When it is necessary to be weighed, you can step on the scale backwards and remind the physician's assistant that you don't want to be told your weight. You'll discover that there are plenty of other interesting—and more substantive—things about becoming a mother that you can talk about than the number on the scale.

Choose a Health Care Provider who is Sensitive to Food, Weight and Body Image Issues

Most women have struggled with poor body image and many have personal experience with disordered eating. That means we need to find prenatal and postpartum healthcare providers who are knowledgeable and compassionate when it comes to these issues. We've heard from women who ended up in the examination room—and sometimes even the delivery room—feeling belittled and unsupported by their own doctors. The best way to avoid this scenario is to push through whatever shame you might be feeling and be upfront with your OB or midwife about your history and your pregnancy-related body image fears. If you're met with criticism or any other reaction that makes you feel uncomfortable, remember that you are well within your rights to walk out that door and find another doctor who will treat you with more respect. Of those we surveyed, 73% of pregnant women with body image issues and histories of eating disorders and disordered eating said they had not discussed this history with their OBs or midwives. It's time to break that dangerous silence.

Be Aware of the Triggers of Pregnancy

The incessant counting, comparing, and measuring that happens during those nine months and beyond can tap into some of the very vulnerabilities that are linked to eating disorders and food and weight obsessions. Perfectionism, loss of control, feelings of isolation, and memories of childhood often bubble right to the surface. But if you're getting the support you need, you'll have a better chance of weathering those storms without resorting to self-destructive habits.

Resist the Urge to Shut Down or Close Off

Remember that there is nothing shameful about asking for help. It's the most courageous thing you can do for yourself and your baby. Look at your recovery as an ongoing process that will help you reach your full potential as an individual and as a mother.

Break the Cycle of Body Hatred

Allow yourself to celebrate the fact that your body is working some serious magic right now. Before you get stymied by stretch marks or focused on flabby skin, take time to reflect on how you will teach your child—in your words and in your actions—that you appreciate your body. We have the power to help future generations grow up placing a higher value on good health than on weight and physical appearance. But before we can pass along those positive attitudes, we must first embrace them for ourselves.