

# Obesity and Pregnancy

## Weight Loss Surgery Can Lead To Healthier Outcomes

“Pregnant obese women are at increased risk for gestational diabetes, hypertension and miscarriage,” says Johns Hopkins Bayview obstetrician Roxanne Jamshidi, M.D., MPH, an investigator of a recent study on the effects of bariatric surgery on reducing pregnancy complications. “Obese women also have a higher rate of cesarean sections,” she adds.

Obesity is determined by Body Mass Index (BMI) which is calculated based on weight and height. A person is obese if their BMI is greater than 30. To consider bariatric surgery, generally one needs a BMI of 35-39.9 and two or more co-morbidities such as high blood pressure, or, a BMI of 40 or more.

Dr. Jamshidi and a team of Johns Hopkins researchers published results in the *British Medical Journal* concluding that bariatric surgery significantly reduces the risk of

hypertensive disorders in pregnancy. These findings describe that obese women who have bariatric surgery and lose significant weight before pregnancy are at much lower risk for developing gestational hypertension (high blood pressure), preeclampsia (high blood pressure with protein in the urine) and eclampsia (preeclampsia with seizures) during pregnancy than those who do not.

Another investigator on the study, Kimberley Steele, M.D., FACS, a surgeon at the Johns Hopkins Center for Bariatric Surgery, cautions that when a woman loses weight, her fertility can increase. She also advises that a woman who has had a bariatric surgery procedure, such as gastric bypass, wait at least 18 months before becoming pregnant.

For pregnant women who have had bariatric surgery, it is essential to take a prenatal vitamin in addition to the vitamins that help their nutrition after surgery. Eating protein and staying well-hydrated also are important.

“Some women are surprised to learn that if they get to a healthier, lower weight before pregnancy, they should still gain weight during pregnancy,” notes Dr. Steele.

“Pregnant obese women are at increased risk for gestational diabetes, hypertension and miscarriage.”

**23% of women  
ages 20-44  
are obese.**

—Source: *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 2009

**Roxanne Jamshidi, M.D.**  
*Obstetrician*



**Kimberley Steele, M.D.**  
*Bariatric surgeon*



For any obese woman thinking about becoming pregnant, see your doctor first to make sure that you are in good health overall. Achieving a healthy weight before pregnancy is better for mother and baby.

—Karen Tong



An informational session about bariatric surgery is available online at [hopkinsbayview.org/bariatrics/infosession](http://hopkinsbayview.org/bariatrics/infosession). Sessions also are held several times each month at Johns Hopkins Bayview, the Wellness Center at Howard County General Hospital and Suburban Hospital in Bethesda. To see the calendar, visit [hopkinsbayview.org/bariatrics/calendar.html](http://hopkinsbayview.org/bariatrics/calendar.html).

For more information about bariatric surgery, call 410-550-0409  
or visit [hopkinsbayview.org/weightloss](http://hopkinsbayview.org/weightloss).