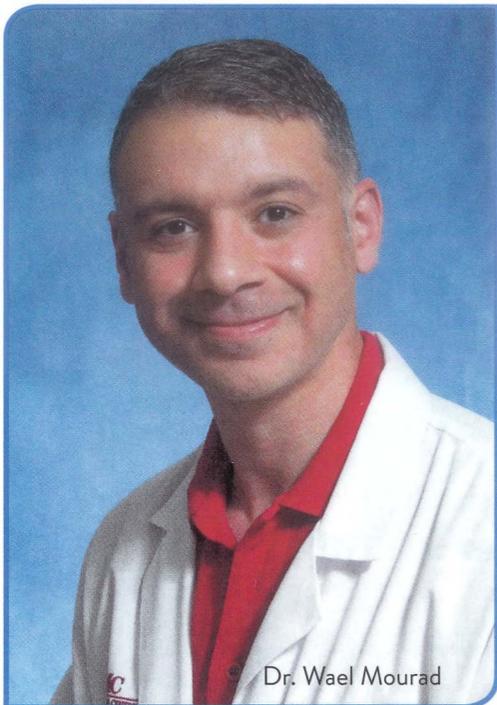


Early and Consistent Prenatal Care is Important

Here are some of the things that you must do to ensure good prenatal care:

See a doctor regularly

Regular checkups throughout pregnancy are crucial for making sure that everything is going well with you and your baby. You will see an obstetrician, or OB, for prenatal care. Women who do not get prenatal care have three times the risk of having babies with low birth weight, and five times the risk of having a stillbirth.



Dr. Wael Mourad

Dr. Wael Mourad, assistant program director for Women's Health at Truman Medical Center - Lakewood, advises newly pregnant women to make a first OB appointment within the first trimester. "But there's nothing wrong with making a first appointment as soon as she finds out that she's pregnant," says Dr. Mourad.

You will give your medical history, have a physical exam, have blood drawn for lab tests, and possibly an ultrasound. OB appointments are generally scheduled once a month until the third trimester. From then until week 36, you will see your OB every two weeks, and then once weekly until you give birth.

Deb Bersano, certified nurse midwife at Truman Medical Centers, says, "If a patient feels like they can get their questions answered, they have less stress and better pregnancies, and possibly better labor and deliveries."

Eat a nutritious diet and monitor weight gain

During pregnancy, your growing baby will receive all of its nutrition through you. Therefore, it is more important than ever to eat a healthy, balanced diet that is rich in protein and fiber. You should typically consume an extra 300 calories a day during pregnancy.

If you are at a healthy weight, then you should gain 25 to 35 pounds during pregnancy. If you are overweight or obese, you should gain less (11 to 25 lbs.), and if you are underweight, then you should gain more (28 to 40 lbs.).

Dr. Mourad highlights the need for folic acid supplements, ideally, even before pregnancy. Folic acid is critical for brain and spinal cord development in early pregnancy, and for iron in later pregnancy. "As soon as a woman learns that she's pregnant, she should start taking a prenatal vitamin daily, which will contain adequate amounts of these two key vitamins."

"Some people can work until the day they deliver. Some find it a real chore just to get up in the morning. It's different for everyone." -Bersano

Manage discomforts by the trimester

During the first trimester, many pregnant women experience morning sickness, a nauseated feeling that may last the entire day. Eating small meals throughout the day and avoiding an empty stomach may help ease symptoms. You might also experience fatigue, breast tenderness, constipation and a frequent need to urinate.

Your second trimester may well be the most pleasant of the three, with dissipation of morning sickness and increased energy. However, you might see the onset of body aches, stretch marks and swelling of the ankles, fingers or face.

During the third trimester, the baby grows dramatically, potentially creating more discomfort for you. You may experience heartburn, shortness of breath, hemorrhoids and have trouble sleeping.

The discomforts of pregnancy vary from woman to woman, however. Bersano says, "Some people can work until the day they deliver. Some find it a real chore just to get up in the morning. It's different for everyone."

Work with your OB to treat any complications

Many pregnancies encounter some form of complication, but treated appropriately, can still result in a healthy outcome. The key is for you to call your OB if you sense that something is not right.

You should call your doctor if there is any bleeding, but especially if it is accompanied by cramping. Any bleeding in the second or third trimesters is cause for concern and warrants an immediate call to the OB.

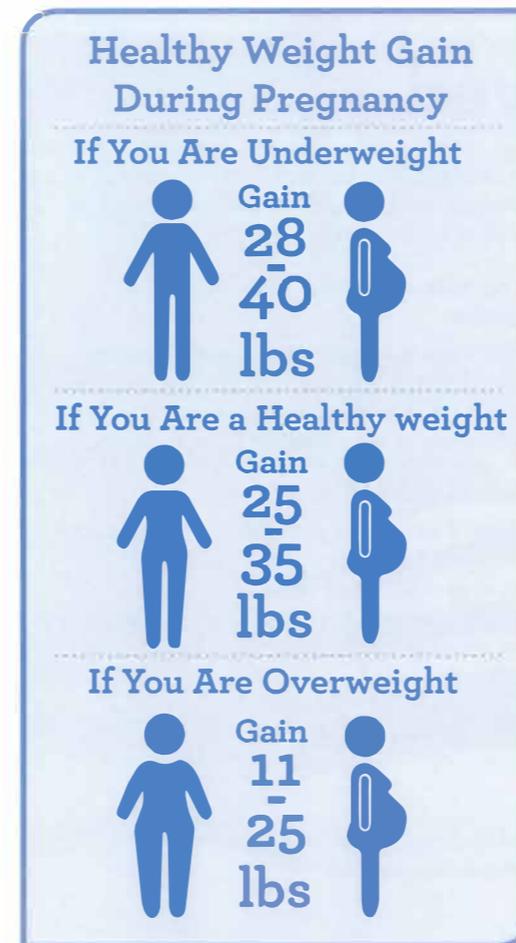
Dr. Mourad says, "Anytime and every time she has vaginal bleeding, or anytime she senses that something is not right, she should call her doctor. We would much rather have a false alarm than to have complication that we are missing."

Bersano agrees, "If you have a problem, I don't want to hear about it at your next appointment. I want to know when you're having the problem!"

If you develop high blood pressure during pregnancy, it will need to be treated with monitoring, lifestyle changes, or medication. High blood pressure puts you at higher risk of developing preeclampsia in the later stages of pregnancy, which is life threatening to both mother and baby.

If you are overweight or obese, you are more at risk for developing gestational diabetes. Gestational diabetes is diabetes developed during pregnancy and can lead to preeclampsia (a potentially dangerous pregnancy complication characterized by high blood pressure), early delivery, and health risks in a newborn baby. An OB doctor will work with you to help control blood sugar and monitor gestational diabetes.

Even with all of the concerns of a mother-to-be, pregnancy should be an exciting and happy time. Feeling the baby's movements, thinking of names, and wondering what his or her face will look like are the moments to treasure. When your baby is in your arms and you start your journey together as a family, all the prenatal care will have been worth it.



Deb Bersano, certified nurse midwife at Truman Medical Center