

# Slimming World

supporting pregnant and breastfeeding women



Slimming World has been at the forefront of weight management in the UK since 1969. Since then, much has changed, but much has remained the same. A warm, friendly and powerfully motivating group support system, designed to inspire and encourage members to make positive changes and to develop new healthy habits for life, still lies at the heart of our unique programme. Slimming World encourages and helps women to lose weight before conceiving, supports them to eat healthily and stay physically active during their pregnancy and encourages mothers to breastfeed and manage their weight healthily after birth.

## During pregnancy

Over 90% of our members are women and many join us after gaining weight during a pregnancy. If they become pregnant again they often fear that they'll re-gain excess weight. We wanted to be able to support women at this time, rather than closing our doors to them, and that's why we developed our policy and support for pregnant women, in collaboration with The Royal College of Midwives.

During a member's pregnancy our support focuses on healthy lifestyle behaviours rather than weight loss, with a main aim of preventing excess weight gain. Our eating plan, Food Optimising, allows members to follow a healthy, balanced diet without calorie restriction, and our Body Magic programme encourages and supports members in finding their own personal and enjoyable way of building regular physical activity into daily life. These lifestyle changes are facilitated within our empowering, supportive groups.

As there are no formal evidence-based guidelines on recommended weight gain during pregnancy and women are best advised by their health care team depending on individual circumstances, our members are required to gain support from their midwife to attend group while pregnant. Slimming World does not advise on weight change during a member's pregnancy and instead supports the member in following a healthy lifestyle and achieving any goals or recommendations suggested by their midwife and healthcare team.

## Breastfeeding mothers

Slimming World recommends that breastfeeding mothers eat a varied, healthy diet to supply all the extra nutrients needed. We advise that they enjoy additional calcium- and fibre-rich foods rather than increasing their intake of high fat/sugary foods to support their additional energy and nutrient needs.

A booklet detailing the current recommendations for healthy eating, keeping active and food safety and how our eating plan Food Optimising fits with this, is provided free of charge to all pregnant and breastfeeding members in group.



Slimming World and The Royal College of Midwives, working together to help women successfully manage their weight before, during and after one of the most exciting events in their lives.

**Slimming**<sup>®</sup>  
WORLD

touching hearts, changing lives

# safe weight management in pregnancy and beyond

We have worked in collaboration with The Royal College of Midwives to develop our policy on the best way to support our members in managing their weight during pregnancy.

The RCM was pleased that Slimming World was able to offer this support and importantly to help women avoid excess weight gain, which can result in an increased chance of problems during pregnancy and birth. We are now working closely with the RCM as an RCM Alliance partner to continue to raise awareness of the right kind of weight management in pregnancy, ultimately to improve the health of women and their babies.

## Our policy for pregnant members

Slimming World does not advise on weight change during a member's pregnancy and we do not encourage weight loss during this time. Instead we support members in eating a balanced, healthy diet and remaining physically active. We also support members in achieving any weight change recommendations made by their health care team, particularly in preventing excess weight gain.

Therefore:

- Any member wishing to continue attending their Slimming World group during their pregnancy must discuss this with their midwife and gain support from them or another healthcare professional to whom their midwife may refer (such as the maternity unit dietitian).
- Slimming World group Consultants support the member in maintaining (or adopting) a healthy balanced diet to manage her weight safely, as advised by her midwife.

## Collaboration with midwives

- We provide a Pregnancy Weight Management Form for our members to take to their midwife at each appointment.
- The form has a section for the midwife to provide any recommendations or suggestions discussed with the member regarding their weight management. The member's Slimming World Consultant will then discuss this with them when they return to group.
- If the member does not require her weight to be monitored during her pregnancy this can be indicated on the form.
- With her midwife's support, the member can then continue attending her group to receive encouragement and regular support in continuing to eat a healthy balanced diet and remaining active during her pregnancy.

We have procedures in place to monitor members closely during their pregnancy. Any weight losses are closely monitored with a system in place to investigate and feed back to the member's health care team.

## Research and development

Slimming World has an active research programme which includes research into pregnancy and postnatal weight management.

### During pregnancy

A feasibility study with midwives in Cardiff indicated that attending Slimming World during pregnancy had no detrimental effect on length of pregnancy and birth weight. Using IOM guidelines, 94% of women avoided excess weight gain during their pregnancy and postnatally breastfeeding rates were higher than the national average<sup>1</sup>. From the feasibility study a large-scale Randomised Controlled Trial was developed looking at the benefits of healthy behaviour change and weight management support during pregnancy in the UK<sup>2</sup>. The HELP Study (Healthy Eating in Lifestyle and Pregnancy), involving 598 pregnant women, found that 12-months postpartum, women who had attended Slimming World during and after pregnancy had healthier diets, including higher fibre intake, and had significantly lower levels of risky drinking than the control group.

### Postnatal evidence

Slimming World conducted a survey involving 1,015 women who had joined a local group postnatally for weight management support. Most women engaged in the programme between 6-26 weeks after giving birth. The most common reasons for engaging

were to improve their health and self-confidence and how they felt about their body shape and size, rather than due to any social or media pressure or recommendation from a healthcare professional. Attendance resulted in significant weight loss and increases in self-esteem, self-confidence and wellbeing<sup>3</sup>.

Furthering our research into postnatal weight management, Slimming World was involved in a study aiming to determine the impact of a lifestyle intervention program for women who were overweight and had previous gestational diabetes. The trial resulted in significantly greater weight loss at 6 months compared with usual care, which could prove beneficial in terms of better long-term health and subsequent prevention of type 2 diabetes for women with previous gestational diabetes<sup>4</sup>.

A feasibility study by Bick et al. (2020) showed that women who joined Slimming World postnatally were significantly less likely to be drinking sugary drinks and alcohol than control women at 6 months post-partum, and those who attended 10+ Slimming World sessions had significantly greater weight loss at 12 months than women in the control group<sup>5</sup>.

1. Jewell K et al. 2014. The healthy eating and lifestyle in pregnancy feasibility study. *British Journal of Midwifery* 22(10):727-736
2. Simpson S et al 2021. Healthy eating and lifestyle in pregnancy (HELP): a cluster randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of a weight management intervention for pregnant women with obesity on weight at 12 months postpartum. *International Journal of Obesity* 45:1728-1739
3. Avery A et al. 2016. Factors influencing engagement in postnatal weight management and subsequent weight and wellbeing outcomes. *British Journal of Midwifery* 24(11): 806-812.
4. Holmes VA et al. 2018. Postnatal lifestyle intervention for overweight women with previous gestational diabetes: A randomized controlled trial. *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, 103(7): 2478-2487.
5. Bick D et al. 2020. Lifestyle information and commercial weight management groups to support maternal postnatal weight management and positive lifestyle behaviour: the SWAN feasibility randomised controlled trial. *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 127:636-645