

## **Losing Baby Fat - Safe weight loss after childbirth**

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Previously printed in The Boston Globe, April 1994

Like so many other women, Christina W. never had a weight problem until after the birth of her first child. Not only did nine months of pregnancy produce a beautiful baby boy, but it also left her with 30 pounds of unwanted, excess weight. After failing to lose those extra pounds on her own, Christina decided to obtain more information and guidance from a registered dietitian. Only six months after her baby was born, Christina is only a few pounds away from her pre-pregnancy weight.

What was the secret to her success? Incorporating good eating habits and exercise into her daily schedule.

"I feel great, and I can fit into most of my clothes again," says Christina. "The dietitian worked with my habits and routines and taught me to reduce fat in my diet while taking in enough calories and nutrients to breast feed successfully.

A study led by the Massachusetts Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program shows that, during pregnancy, 42 percent of women gain more than the recommended 25-35 pounds, which makes returning to shape especially difficult after childbirth. The average amount of weight retained after each birth is about 2 pounds, but can be much higher when women gain too much weight during pregnancy.

Many women often feel that they are too overwhelmed after the birth of a new baby and overlook their own needs as they care for others in their family. Often relaxation and exercise are viewed as a luxury. Staying active is an important part of weight loss and will help get muscles back into shape.

Extra pounds are even more difficult to take off if a woman is overweight when she begins her pregnancy. Studies indicate a strong correlation between large prenatal weight gains and postpartum weight retention.

One factor that may actually contribute to prenatal weight gain is a woman's age. Because the body's metabolic rate decreases one-half percent every year after age 26, as people get older, they need fewer calories or an increase in exercise. People's exercise and eating habits, however, usually do not change with age. So, unless a lifestyle change is made, a gradual weight gain of one and a half pounds per year is possible.

Instead of candies, cookies, and chips, it is important to have low-fat nutritious foods, like fruits, vegetables and nuts within reach. Eating regular meals will also help decrease caloric intake. When you skip meals and are extremely hungry, you are more likely to grab high-calorie high-fat foods, and overeat.

One of the important things Christina learned was the importance of losing weight at a safe pace.

The first month after her baby was born she lost almost ten pounds - a bit too much for a breast feeding mother. The dietitian made only a few changes to her daily patterns in order to alter her fat and calorie intake. Christina is now losing weight at a slower, but regular pace.

A mother should expect a slow gradual weight loss during the first six months after the birth of a new baby. According to the National Academy of Sciences, breast feeding mothers should lose no more than four to five pounds per month. By following these guidelines, women can get back to their pregnancy weight in five to seven months after childbirth.

You have to remember to attempt to lose weight slowly and safely. Be patient and remember to pay attention to yourself.

To make an appointment with a Registered Dietitian for post-partum weight loss, call the Nutrition Consultation Service at Brigham and Women's Hospital: (617) 732-6054.