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## Healthcare NEWS

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# Study reveals weight loss as low as 5% can improve chances of pregnancy for obese women



Losing weight is difficult for most people. As if that is not enough, it is also said that women generally have a harder time shedding off excess pounds than men. Although there is a healthy target weight that needs to be achieved when one is aiming for weight loss, experts agree that even a modest reduction in your total body weight is beneficial for your overall health. In fact, for women struggling with obesity and infertility, losing as little as 5 per cent of their body weight can dramatically improve their chances of pregnancy, a study reveals.

Evidence proves that extra body weight affects a woman's ovulation and decreases her chances of getting pregnant. Although bringing your weight down to the healthy range is ideal for your fertility and the baby's health, the *Human Reprod* study, led by A.M. Clark from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the University of Adelaide in Australia, shows that a small step of 5 per cent weight reduction can assist in achieving pregnancy.

In the study, a weight management program was assessed to determine whether it could help overweight anovulatory women to establish ovulation and help achieve pregnancy without further medical intervention. Anovulation refers to a cycle in which a woman fails to ovulate. Although most women will experience anovulatory cycles at some point in their lives, it is considered abnormal and a common cause of infertility.

Participants in the study underwent a six month programme of behavioural and lifestyle change, committing to regular physical activity and balanced diet. Women lost an average of 6.3 kg, with 12 of the 13 subjects resuming ovulation and 11 of them becoming pregnant. Improvements in the subjects' fitness, diet and self-esteem were also observed. Researchers concluded that weight loss, with its subsequent improvements in ovulation, fitness and psychometric measurements, is a viable first-line treatment option for obese women suffering from infertility.

Obesity has become a major problem globally, more so because of the health consequences associated with it. The World Health Organisation predicted that there will be over 2.3 billion overweight and 700 million obese individuals by the end of 2016. The UAE in particular has a very high rate of obese people with a study by the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation revealing that more than 66 per cent of men and 60 per cent of women in the UAE are already overweight or obese.

While obesity and its links to diabetes, heart disease and chronic health complications are often highlighted, its impact on women's fertility is not emphasized enough.

Dr. Patrick Noel, Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgeon for The American Surgecenter in Abu Dhabi, said: "Obese women are three times more likely to suffer infertility than women with a normal body mass index, especially because obesity causes hormonal imbalances and problems with ovulation."

Exercise and dieting may not result in weight loss for some individuals, even despite repeated attempts. Until a few years back, this would mean a very worrying and helpless situation for the person trying to lose weight. Fortunately, there is ever growing evidence today to show that weight loss surgeries can increase fertility in women.

"Obesity adversely impacts fertility – and even in vitro fertilization (IVF) outcomes – through a variety of mechanisms. Weight loss by surgical procedures can increase fertility in women by improving menstrual cyclicity in anovulatory women. The increased risk of miscarriage in obese women may also decline after bariatric surgery. Moreover, study findings suggest that women who have gone through weight loss surgery were less likely to suffer from diabetes during pregnancy," Dr. Noel explained.

While bariatric surgery promises hope for obese women struggling to conceive, Dr. Noel emphasized that it is not suited for everyone. "Weight loss surgery should only be considered as a last option. If you still fail after repeated attempts to lose weight through diet and exercise, then that's the only time you should consider bariatric surgery. Moreover, it is important for women who successfully gets pregnant after undergoing bariatric surgery to undergo strict post-operative care and be followed up by a group of specialists including a nutritionist, an educated nursing staff, an obstetrician, an endocrinologist, an internal medicine specialist, and a bariatric surgeon," Dr. Noel concluded.

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