

Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan

# Fit for Two

TIPS FOR PREGNANCY



National Institute of  
Diabetes and Digestive  
and Kidney Diseases

**WIN** Weight-control  
Information Network

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(see tear-off)

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Visit WIN's website to view all WIN publications at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>.

## INTRODUCTION

This brochure is part of the Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan Series from the Weight-control Information Network (WIN). The series offers health tips for readers at various life stages, including adulthood, pregnancy, parenthood, and later life. The series is also available in Spanish.

### How can I use this brochure?

This brochure is one of several resources from WIN that may help you and your family. It gives you tips on how to eat better and be more active while you are pregnant and after your baby is born. Use the ideas and tips in this brochure to improve your eating pattern and be more physically active.

These tips can also be useful if you are not pregnant but are thinking about having a baby! By making changes now, you can get used to new eating and activity habits and be a healthy example for your family for a lifetime.



## HEALTHY WEIGHT

### Why is gaining a healthy amount of weight during pregnancy important?

Gaining the right amount of weight during pregnancy helps your baby grow to a healthy size. But gaining too much or too little weight may lead to serious health problems for you and your baby.

Too much weight gain raises your chances for diabetes and high blood pressure during pregnancy and after. If you are overweight when you get pregnant, your chances for health problems may be even higher. It also makes it more likely that you will have a hard delivery and need a cesarean section (C-section).

Gaining a healthy amount of weight helps you have an easier pregnancy and delivery. It may also help make it easier for you to get back to your normal weight after delivery. Research shows that a healthy weight gain can also lower the chances that you or your child will have obesity and weight-related problems later in life.

### How much weight should I gain during my pregnancy?

How much weight you should gain depends on how much you weighed before pregnancy. See the box “Weight Gain during Pregnancy” for more advice.<sup>1</sup>

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**Gaining too much or too little weight may lead to serious health problems for you and your baby.**

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine. *Weight Gain During Pregnancy: Reexamining the Guidelines*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press; 2009.

**TOOLS  
YOU CAN  
USE**

## Weight Gain during Pregnancy

General weight-gain advice below refers to weight before pregnancy and is for women having only one baby.

If you are	You should gain about
underweight (BMI* less than 18.5)	28 to 40 pounds
normal weight (BMI of 18.5 to 24.9)	25 to 35 pounds
overweight (BMI of 25 to 29.9)	15 to 25 pounds
obese (BMI of 30+)	11 to 20 pounds

\*The body mass index (BMI) measures your weight in relation to your height. See the Resources section for a link to an online BMI calculator.

It is important to gain weight very slowly. The old myth that you are “eating for two” is not true. During the first 3 months, your baby is only the size of a walnut and does not need very many extra calories. The following rate of weight gain is advised:

- 1 to 4 pounds total in the first 3 months
- 2 to 4 pounds each month from 4 months until delivery

Talk to your health care provider about how much weight you should gain. Work with him or her to set goals for your weight gain. Take into account your age, weight, and health. Track your weight at home or at your provider visits using charts from the Institute of Medicine. See *Weight Gain During Pregnancy: Reexamining the Guidelines* in the Resources section for a link to these charts.

Do not try to lose weight if you are pregnant. Healthy food is needed to help your baby grow. Some women may lose a small amount of weight at the start of pregnancy. Speak to your health care provider if this happens to you.



**Talk to your health care provider about how much weight you should gain during pregnancy.**

## HEALTHY EATING

### How much should I eat?

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**In the first 3 months of pregnancy, most women do not need extra calories.**

Eating healthy foods and the right amount of calories helps you and your baby gain the proper amount of weight.

How much food you need depends on things like your weight before pregnancy, your age, and how fast you gain weight. In the first 3 months of pregnancy, most women do not need extra calories. You also may not need extra calories during the final weeks of pregnancy.



Check with your doctor about this. If you are not gaining the right amount of weight, your doctor may advise you to eat more calories. If you are gaining too much weight, you may need to cut down on calories. Each woman's needs are different. Your needs depend on if you were underweight, overweight, or obese before you became pregnant, or if you are having more than one baby.

## What kinds of foods should I eat?

A healthy eating plan for pregnancy includes nutrient-rich foods. Current U.S. dietary guidelines advise eating these foods each day:

- fruits and veggies (provide vitamins and fiber)
- whole grains, like oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, and brown rice (provide fiber, B vitamins, and other needed nutrients)
- fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products or non-dairy soy, almond, rice, or other drinks with added calcium and vitamin D
- protein from healthy sources, like beans and peas, eggs, lean meats, seafood (8 to 12 ounces per week), and unsalted nuts and seeds

A healthy eating plan also limits salt, solid fats (like butter, lard, and shortening), and sugar-sweetened drinks and foods.





## What if I am a vegetarian?

A vegetarian eating plan during pregnancy can be healthy. Talk to your health care provider to make sure you are getting calcium, iron, protein, vitamin B12, vitamin D, and other needed nutrients. He or she may ask you to meet with a registered dietitian (a nutrition expert who has a degree in diet and nutrition approved by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, has passed a national exam, and is licensed to practice in your state) who can help you plan meals. Your doctor may also tell you to take vitamins and minerals that will help you meet your needs.



Does your eating plan measure up? How can you improve your eating habits? Try eating fruit like berries or a banana with low-fat yogurt for breakfast, a salad with beans for lunch, and a lean chicken breast and steamed veggies for dinner. Think about things you can try. Write down your ideas in the space below and share them with your doctor.

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For more about healthy eating, see the MyPlate links in the Resources section of this fact sheet. They include a link to the online program “Daily Food Plan for Moms.” It can help you make an eating plan for each trimester (3 months) of your pregnancy.

## Do I have any special nutrition needs now that I am pregnant?

Yes. During pregnancy, you need more vitamins and minerals, like folate, iron, and calcium.

Getting the right amount of folate is very important. Folate, a B vitamin also known as folic acid, may help prevent birth defects. Before pregnancy, you need 400 mcg per day. During pregnancy and when breastfeeding, you need 600 mcg per day from foods or vitamins. Foods high in folate include orange juice, strawberries, spinach, broccoli, beans, and fortified breads and breakfast cereals.



During pregnancy, you need more vitamins and minerals, like folate, iron, and calcium.

Most health care providers tell women who are pregnant to take a prenatal vitamin every day and eat a healthy diet. Ask your doctor about what you should take.

## What other new eating habits may help my weight gain?

Pregnancy can create some new food and eating concerns. Meet the needs of your body and be more comfortable with these tips:

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**Make sure you eat enough high-fiber foods during pregnancy and drink plenty of water.**



- **Eat breakfast every day.** If you feel sick to your stomach in the morning, try dry whole-wheat toast or whole-grain crackers when you first wake up. Eat them even before you get out of bed. Eat the rest of your breakfast (fruit, oatmeal, whole-grain cereal, low-fat milk or yogurt, or other foods) later in the morning.
- **Eat high-fiber foods.** Eating high-fiber foods, drinking plenty of water, and getting daily physical activity may help prevent constipation. Try to eat whole-grain cereals, vegetables, fruits, and beans.
- **If you have heartburn, eat small meals more often.** Try to eat slowly and avoid spicy and fatty foods (such as hot peppers or fried chicken). Have drinks between meals instead of with meals. Do not lie down soon after eating.

## What foods should I avoid?

There are certain foods and drinks that can harm your baby if you have them while you are pregnant. Here is a list of items you should avoid:

- **Alcohol.** Do not drink alcohol like wine or beer. Enjoy decaf coffee or tea, non-sugar-sweetened drinks, or water with a dash of juice. Avoid diet drinks and drinks with caffeine.
- **Fish that may have high levels of mercury** (a substance that can build up in fish and harm an unborn baby). You should eat 8 to 12 ounces of seafood per week, but limit white (albacore) tuna to 6 ounces per week. Do not eat tilefish, shark, swordfish, and king mackerel.
- **Anything that is not food.** Some pregnant women may crave something that is not food, such as laundry starch or clay. This may mean that you are not getting the right amount of a nutrient. Talk to your doctor if you crave something that is not food. He or she can help you get the right amount of nutrients.



Talk to your doctor to find out the amount of nutrients you need during pregnancy.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### Should I be physically active during my pregnancy?

Almost all women can and should be physically active during pregnancy. Regular physical activity may

- help you and your baby gain the right amounts of weight
- reduce backaches, leg cramps, and bloating
- reduce your risk for gestational diabetes (diabetes that develops when a woman is pregnant)

If you were physically active before you became pregnant, you may not need to change your exercise habits. Talk with your health care provider about how to change your workouts during pregnancy.

It can be hard to be physically active if you do not have child care for your other children, have not worked out before, or do not know what to do. Keep reading for tips about how you can work around these things and be physically active.

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Almost all women can and should be physically active during pregnancy.



**TIPS  
YOU CAN  
USE**

## How much physical activity do I need?

Most women need the same amount of physical activity as before they became pregnant. Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity per day on most days of the week. Aerobic activities use large muscle groups (back, chest, and legs) to increase heart rate and breathing.

The aerobic activity should last at least 10 minutes at a time and should be of moderate intensity. This means it makes you breathe harder but does not overwork or overheat you.

If you have health issues like obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, or anemia (too few healthy red blood cells), ask your health care provider about a level of activity that is safe for you.

## How can I stay active while pregnant?

Even if you have not been active before, you can be active during your pregnancy by using the tips below:

- Go for a walk around the block, in a local park, or in a shopping mall with a family member or friend. If you already have children, take them with you and make it a family outing.
- Get up and move around at least once an hour if you sit in a chair most of the day. When watching TV, get up and move around during commercials. Even a simple activity like walking in place can help.

## How can I stay safe while being active?

For your health and safety, and for your baby's, you should not do some physical activities while pregnant. Some of these are listed below. Talk to your health care provider about other physical activities that you should not do.

### TIPS YOU CAN USE

## Safety Dos and Don'ts

Follow these safety tips while being active.

### DO...

- Choose moderate activities that are not likely to injure you, such as walking or aqua aerobics.
- Drink fluids before, during, and after being physically active.
- Wear comfortable clothing that fits well and supports and protects your breasts.
- Stop exercising if you feel dizzy, short of breath, tired, or sick to your stomach.



### DON'T...

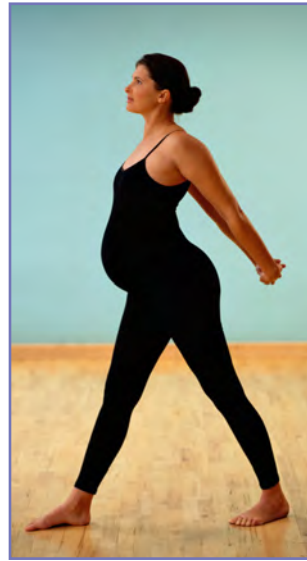
- Avoid brisk exercise outside during very hot weather.
- Don't use steam rooms, hot tubs, and saunas.
- After the end of week 12 of your pregnancy, avoid exercises that call for you to lie flat on your back.

Make a plan to be active while pregnant. List the activities you would like to do, such as walking or taking a prenatal yoga class. Think of the days and times you could do each activity on your list, like first thing in the morning, during lunch break from work, after dinner, or on Saturday afternoon. Look at your calendar or planner to find the days and times that work best, and commit to those plans.

**ACTIVITY**

**WHEN**

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**Make a plan to be active while pregnant and commit to it.**



## AFTER THE BABY IS BORN

### How can I stay healthy after my baby is born?

After you deliver your baby, your health may be better if you try to return to a healthy weight. Not losing weight may lead to overweight or obesity later in life. Returning to a healthy weight may lower your chances of diabetes, heart disease, and other weight-related problems.

Healthy eating and physical activity habits after your baby is born may help you return to a healthy weight faster and give you energy.

After your baby is born

- keep eating well. Eat foods from all of the food groups. See MyPlate in the Resources section for advice to help you stay healthy and fit.
- check with your health care provider first, then slowly get used to a routine of regular, moderate-intensity physical activity, like a daily walk. This type of activity will not hurt your milk supply if you are breastfeeding.

### How may breastfeeding help?

Breastfeeding may or may not make it easier for you to lose weight because your body burns extra energy to produce milk. Even though breastfeeding may not help you lose weight, it is linked to other benefits for mother and child (see “Benefits of Breastfeeding” box).



After your baby is born start out with physical activity done at a moderate intensity.

## Benefits of Breastfeeding



### Breastfeeding your baby

- gives him or her the right mix of nutrients in a liquid (breast milk) that is easier to digest than formula
- helps boost his or her immune system
- helps protect your baby from common problems, like ear infections and diarrhea

Many leading health groups advise breastfeeding only for the first 6 months of the baby's life. This means that you should feed your baby only breast milk during this time—no other foods or drinks. Experts suggest that women breastfeed at least until the baby reaches 12 months. In months 6 through 12, you may give your baby other types of food in addition to breast milk.

Calorie needs when you are breastfeeding depend on how much body fat you have and how active you are. Ask your doctor how many calories you need.

## What else may help?

Pregnancy and the time after you deliver your baby can be wonderful, exciting, emotional, stressful, and tiring—all at once. These feelings

may cause you to overeat, not eat enough, or lose your drive and energy. Being good to yourself can help you cope with your feelings and follow healthy eating and physical activity habits.

Here are some ideas that may help:

- Sleep when the baby sleeps.
- Watch a funny movie.
- Ask someone you trust to watch your baby while you nap, bathe, read, go for a walk, or go grocery shopping.
- Explore groups that you and your newborn can join, such as “new moms” groups.

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**Try joining a group for moms and newborns.**



## RESOURCES

### Additional Reading from the Weight-control Information Network

The following publications are available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications> and also by calling WIN toll-free at 1-877-946-4627:

***Better Health and You: Tips for Adults*** helps adults plan steps toward consuming healthier foods and beverages and being more physically active. Featuring a tear-off tip sheet perfect for posting on your fridge, this brochure also explains the benefits of getting healthy and the harmful effects of being overweight (available online at [http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/better\\_health.htm](http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/better_health.htm)).

***Changing Your Habits: Steps to Better Health*** explains how people can take small steps to become more physically active and consume healthier foods and beverages (available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/changing-habits.htm>).

***Energize Yourself and Your Family!*** describes how being healthy and active can help you gain the energy you need to keep up with the demands of your busy life. Tips suggest how you can take better care of yourself to be there for the people who depend on you (available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/energize.htm>).

***Just Enough for You: About Food Portions*** explains the difference between a portion and a serving, and offers tips to help readers choose healthy portions (available online at [http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/just\\_enough.htm](http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/just_enough.htm)).

***The World Around You*** provides tips on how to use the world around you, no matter who you are or where you live, to stay healthy and fit (available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/way.htm>).

## Additional Resources

### ***2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans***

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines>

### **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**

<http://www.eatright.org>

### **Aim for a Healthy Weight**

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose\\_wt](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt)

### **American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists**

<http://www.acog.org>

### ***Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010***

HHS and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>

### ***Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development**

<http://www.nichd.nih.gov>

### **Food and Nutrition Information Center**

USDA

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic>

### **March of Dimes**

Phone: 1-888-MODIMES (1-888-663-4637)

<http://www.modimes.org>

## **MyPlate**

USDA

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov>

- Daily Food Plan for Moms: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/supertracker-tools/daily-food-plans/moms.html>
- Health and Nutrition Information for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>

## **National Diabetes Education Program**

<http://www.yourdiabetesinfo.org>

## **National Kidney Disease Education Program**

<http://nkdep.nih.gov>

## **Office on Women's Health**

<http://www.womenshealth.gov>

## **Online Body Mass Index Calculator for Adults**

[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose\\_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm)

## **U.S. Government's Food Safety Website**

<http://www.foodsafety.gov>

## ***Weight Gain During Pregnancy: Reexamining the Guidelines***

Institute of Medicine

<http://iom.edu/Reports/2009/Weight-Gain-During-Pregnancy-Reexamining-the-Guidelines>

Inclusion of resources is for information only and does not imply endorsement by NIDDK or WIN.

Photo page 6: Courtesy of Amanda Mills/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Photo page 10: Courtesy of James Gathany/CDC.

## NOTES

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## Why should I participate in clinical trials?

Clinical trials are research studies involving people. Clinical trials look at safe and effective new ways to prevent, detect, or treat disease. Researchers also use clinical trials to look at other aspects of care, such as improving the quality of life for people with chronic illnesses. To learn more about clinical trials, why they matter, and how to participate, visit the NIH Clinical Research Trials and You website at <http://www.nih.gov/health/clinicaltrials>. For information about current studies, visit <http://www.ClinicalTrials.gov>.

## Weight-control Information Network

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**Like WIN on Facebook:**

<http://www.facebook.com/win.niddk.nih.gov>

The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). WIN provides the general public, health professionals, and the media with science-based, up-to-date, culturally relevant materials and tips. Topics include how to consume healthy foods and beverages, barriers to physical activity, portion control, and eating and physical activity myths.

Publications produced by WIN are carefully reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This brochure was also reviewed by Suzanne Phelan, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Kinesiology, California Polytechnic State University and Linda Van Horn, Ph.D., R.D., Professor of Preventive Medicine, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

This brochure is not copyrighted. WIN encourages you to copy and share as many copies as desired. This brochure is also available at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>.

- Talk to your health care provider about how much weight you should gain during your pregnancy. Track your progress on a weight-gain graph.
- Eat foods rich in folate, iron, calcium, and protein. Ask your health care provider about prenatal supplements (vitamins you may take while pregnant).
- Eat breakfast every day.
- Eat foods high in fiber and drink plenty of water to avoid constipation.
- Cut back on “junk” foods and soft drinks.
- Avoid alcohol, raw or undercooked fish, fish high in mercury, undercooked meat and poultry, and soft cheeses.
- Be physically active on most, or all, days of the week during your pregnancy. If you have health issues, talk to your health care provider before you begin.
- After pregnancy, slowly get back to your routine of regular, moderate-intensity physical activity.
- Return to a healthy weight slowly.



## LEARN MORE

Find more tips on healthy eating and physical activity during pregnancy in *Fit for Two: Tips for Pregnancy* available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/two.htm>.



**Instructions:** Find your height (in inches) in the left-hand column and move across the row to find the weight closest to yours. If you are in the overweight or obese range on the chart, you may be at risk for certain health problems.

**BODY MASS INDEX TABLE**

BMI	Normal										Overweight										Obese																																										
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
Height (in)	Body Weight (lbs)																																																														
58	91	96	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	148	153	158	162	167	172	177	181	186	91	96	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	148	153	158	162	167	172	177	181	186	91	96	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	148	153	158	162	167	172	177	181	186
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69	128	135	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	209	216	223	230	236	243	250	257	263	128	135	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	209	216	223	230	236	243	250	257	263	128	135	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	209	216	223	230	236	243	250	257	263
70	132	139	146	153	160	167	174	181	188	195	202	209	216	222	229	236	243	250	257	264	271	132	139	146	153	160	167	174	181	188	195	202	209	216	222	229	236	243	250	257	264	271	132	139	146	153	160	167	174	181	188	195	202	209	216	222	229	236	243	250	257	264	271
71	136	143	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	222	229	236	243	250	257	265	272	279	136	143	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	222	229	236	243	250	257	265	272	279	136	143	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	222	229	236	243	250	257	265	272	279
72	140	147	154	162	169	177	184	191	199	206	213	221	228	235	242	250	258	265	272	279	287	140	147	154	162	169	177	184	191	199	206	213	221	228	235	242	250	258	265	272	279	287	140	147	154	162	169	177	184	191	199	206	213	221	228	235	242	250	258	265	272	279	287
73	144	151	159	166	174	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	235	242	250	257	265	272	280	288	295	144	151	159	166	174	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	235	242	250	257	265	272	280	288	295	144	151	159	166	174	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	235	242	250	257	265	272	280	288	295
74	148	155	163	171	179	186	194	202	210	218	225	233	241	249	256	264	272	280	287	295	303	148	155	163	171	179	186	194	202	210	218	225	233	241	249	256	264	272	280	287	295	303	148	155	163	171	179	186	194	202	210	218	225	233	241	249	256	264	272	280	287	295	303
75	152	160	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	248	256	264	272	279	287	295	303	311	152	160	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	248	256	264	272	279	287	295	303	311	152	160	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	248	256	264	272	279	287	295	303	311
76	156	164	172	180	189	197	205	213	221	230	238	246	254	263	271	279	287	295	304	312	320	156	164	172	180	189	197	205	213	221	230	238	246	254	263	271	279	287	295	304	312	320	156	164	172	180	189	197	205	213	221	230	238	246	254	263	271	279	287	295	304	312	320

Source: Adapted from *Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults. The Evidence Report. NIH Publication No. 98-4083: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 1998.*

The Lifespan Series includes the following publications:

- Fit for Two: Tips for Pregnancy
- Helping Your Child: Tips for Parents
- Better Health and You: Tips for Adults
- Young at Heart: Tips for Older Adults

Spanish-language publications in the Lifespan Series include the following:

- Consejos para la futura mamá
- Cómo ayudar a su hijo
- Cómo mejorar su salud: consejos para adultos
- Sugerencias para personas mayores