

The prevention of low birth weight has been a collaborative effort in Ottawa for over a decade. In 1995, The Ottawa Coalition for the Prevention of Low Birth Weight (formerly the Community Coalition for the Prevention of Low Birth Weight) was formed to increase awareness about low birth weight.

For more information about low birth weight:

- **Talk to your health care provider.**
- Call the City of Ottawa Public Health Info Line at **613-580-6744**.
- Visit the Ottawa Coalition for the Prevention of Low Birth Weight Website at [www.lbwinfo.ca](http://www.lbwinfo.ca).

Funding for this project provided by:



**Success By Six**  
A community initiative to improve  
the lives of young children  
[www.successby6ottawa.ca](http://www.successby6ottawa.ca)

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This booklet and the [lbwinfo.ca](http://lbwinfo.ca) website  
were developed by [Webcanvas.ca](http://Webcanvas.ca)



## Low Birth Weight

### What you need to know

English Translation of Somali and Arabic Booklets

#### What is low birth weight?

Babies who are born too small weigh less than 2500 grams (5½ pounds). This is called low birth weight (LBW). Low birth weight can happen if a baby is born too soon (*preterm*) or if a baby does not grow well during the pregnancy.

A healthy birth weight is important for a good start in life. A balanced diet, a smoke-free life, and knowing how to deal with stress while you are pregnant can help prevent low birth weight.

#### What are the risk factors?

Research has identified several possible factors that are associated with an increased risk of having a low birth weight baby. The factors that increase the risk of low birth weight are multiple and complex.



**The risk factors include:**

- Poor nutrition
- Stress
- Living in poverty
- Few social or family support networks
- Smoking during pregnancy and/or secondhand smoke
- Multiple (twins or triplets) pregnancy
- Jobs that require prolonged standing

**How does low birth weight (LBW) affect the baby, the family and the community?**

- LBW is the main reason babies die in the first year of life.
- Some LBW babies can have life-long health problems.
- LBW babies are at a greater risk of having learning disabilities and visual problems – factors that contribute significantly to delays in development, early learning and school readiness.
- More than 75% of all illnesses and death in the newborn period are related to babies that are born too small.
- A family with a LBW baby must cope with the emotional stress associated with the uncertainty of their baby's future.
- Caring for a child with chronic health problems can cause enormous medical, psychological, and financial stress to the family and the community at large.



**Myth:** It is okay to have low birth weight babies. They will grow big and healthy after they are born.

**Fact:** Low birth weight babies are at risk for health problems, not only as infants but also, sometimes, throughout their lives. In addition, the infant mortality rate increases dramatically when babies are born with a low birth weight.

**Myth:** There is no need to go for a prenatal visit with a doctor or midwife if the mother feels healthy and if there are no problems.

**Fact:** Prenatal visits to a doctor or midwife are key in early recognition and appropriate response to the risk factors associated with low birth weight. Pregnant women must start seeing their doctor or midwife as soon as they know that they are pregnant and continue with regular visits throughout their pregnancy.



## Low birth weight: **Dispelling the myths**

**Myth:** Low birth weight is Allah's will. We have no ability to determine the outcome of pregnancy.

**Fact:** In Islam, we are encouraged to do everything we can to take care of our bodies at all times. Staying healthy during pregnancy is particularly important to give babies a good start in life. A healthy birth weight is important for optimal child development and a good start in life. Therefore, it is our responsibility, as Muslims, to learn the facts about low birth weight and to provide support to all pregnant women. We must all be involved in making healthy birth outcomes possible.

**Myth:** Eating a variety of healthy foods will contribute to babies growing too large. This will create complications in childbirth and the possibilities of having a caesarean section will increase. Hence, it is better to have a low birth weight baby in order to avoid prolonged labour and/or an operation.

**Fact:** There is absolutely no correlation between caesarean births and eating a nutritionally balanced diet while pregnant. Labour is not easier with a low birth weight baby. It can be as hard to give birth to a small baby as it is to give birth to a larger baby. Eating a well-balanced diet helps both the mothers and unborn babies stay healthy. It is critical for women to make good nutritional choices during pregnancy because women who stay healthy during their pregnancy increase their chances of having a healthy baby.



## What can you do to prevent low birth weight?

One way to prevent low birth weight is to become aware of the associated risk factors and to try to reduce or modify them. Providing support to pregnant women will help the mother as well as the child and the community. We all can help promote healthy pregnancies and healthy babies. Here are some simple things you can do.

### A pregnant woman can:

- Learn the facts about low birth weight and how to decrease the risk factors.
- Learn how to manage stress.
- Ask family, friends or neighbours for help with childcare and other household duties.
- Take time to sit and relax; household chores can wait.
- Attend regular visits with her doctor or midwife for prenatal care.
- Learn how to recognize and respond to the signs and symptoms of preterm labour.



### Signs and Symptoms of Preterm Labour:

- A sudden gush or constant leak of fluid from the vagina
- Bleeding from the vagina
- Contractions of the uterus (menstrual-like cramps)

### Or a change in what you normally feel in:

- Low dull back ache or thigh pain
- Pelvic pressure (feeling full or heavy)
- Discharge from the vagina

The more of these symptoms you are feeling, the more likely you are in preterm labour.

Some women may feel that “something is not right”.

***If you think you are having preterm labour, go right away to the hospital where you are planning to give birth.***

### A husband can:

- Learn the facts about low birth weight and how to decrease the risk factors.
- Learn how to recognize and respond to the signs and symptoms of preterm labour.
- Provide extra help and support to his wife.
- Try to reduce stress in her life.
- Care for the other children while she rests.
- Spend time together as a couple, for example go for a walk together.



- Remind her to visit her doctor or midwife for regular prenatal check-ups
- Go to the medical appointments with her.

***Never smoke around a pregnant woman. Second hand smoke affects both mother & baby.***

### Family, friends and neighbours can:

- Offer to help with household activities, like cooking a meal.
- Let her know that you are there to lend a helping hand.
- Offer to go for a walk with her, or other gentle recreational activities.
- Offer to baby-sit if there are other children.
- Be careful to never smoke around a pregnant woman. Second hand smoke can affect both the mother and baby.
- Learn how to recognize and respond to the signs and symptoms of preterm labour.

