

Pregnant mums: Don't be too quick to diet

LAST Friday's article ("Child's obesity risk starts in the womb") correctly identifies prenatal life as a phase in development that influences the health of the individual throughout life, including the risk for obesity.

The article notes that people born heavier are more likely to become obese.

Two important points should be made in order to prevent unnecessary concern and poor prenatal practices among pregnant women.

First, the risk of obesity is apparent only among individuals born quite large, a condition that is commonly associated with diabetic states in the mother during pregnancy (that is, gestational diabetes), for which ob-

stetric screening is a common practice.

Mothers should not consider reducing food intake or minimising weight gain. This practice results in babies born unusually small, which leads us to the second point.

Ironically, babies born at the extremes, either very large or very small, are both at increased risk of obesity. While this may appear confusing, these well-established trends suggest moderation as an advised path for successful pregnancy.

These important considerations have inspired considerable government investment.

The National University of Singapore (with Professor Chong Yap Seng as lead investigator), along with part-

ners at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences), was awarded a Translational Clinical Research grant to study how prenatal development influences the risk of obesity as well as brain development in Singaporean children.

The Growing Up In Singapore Towards Healthy Outcomes study is the leading international study of prenatal development and health over the lifespan.

This research will contribute substantially in developing guidelines for healthy pregnancies among women in Singapore and around the world.

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