

# Obstetric Weight Management

## Postnatal Weight Loss



Pam Finlay, Dietetic Lead at MoreLife and  
Grace Shiplee, contract manager at MoreLife, BedsMK,  
and doctoral researcher at Leeds Beckett University,

Obstetric weight management (OWM) is a specialist area of weight/obesity management. Globally, specialist services tailored to support women, and families, with their weight during preconception, throughout pregnancy and after birth are not common. This is despite a growing body of research that has raised awareness of increased risk of negative health outcomes associated with excess body weight in childbearing.<sup>1,2</sup>

MoreLife is a weight management service provider, helping people and families across the UK. Our goal is to support people to manage their weight through positive behaviour change. MoreLife is a subsidiary of Leeds Beckett University and has a strong interest in research-based, innovative, intervention development. We are currently investing in a doctoral research project to drive the development and understanding of OWM support. A preliminary finding of this research suggests an essential time to support women with their weight in childbearing is in the postnatal period. Specifically, within two years of giving birth. The following article highlights the benefits of losing weight in the postnatal period and discusses some considerations for clinicians and health professionals, when supporting patients along their postnatal weight-loss journey.

National guidelines tell us that targeting women about weight loss after their birth will reduce the risks associated with excess weight in future pregnancies.<sup>3</sup> This makes sense, as many women will conceive many times, and successfully give birth to more than one child. It is common in the time between pregnancies for women to either gain weight, or be unsuccessful at losing gestational weight gained from their previous pregnancy. This is where the lines blur between postnatal, and preconception, weight management. Which is interesting, as research highlights both pre- and post-pregnancy as the optimal times to reduce excess weight and promote healthy pregnancy for both mother and baby.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the time between pregnancies is doubly as important.

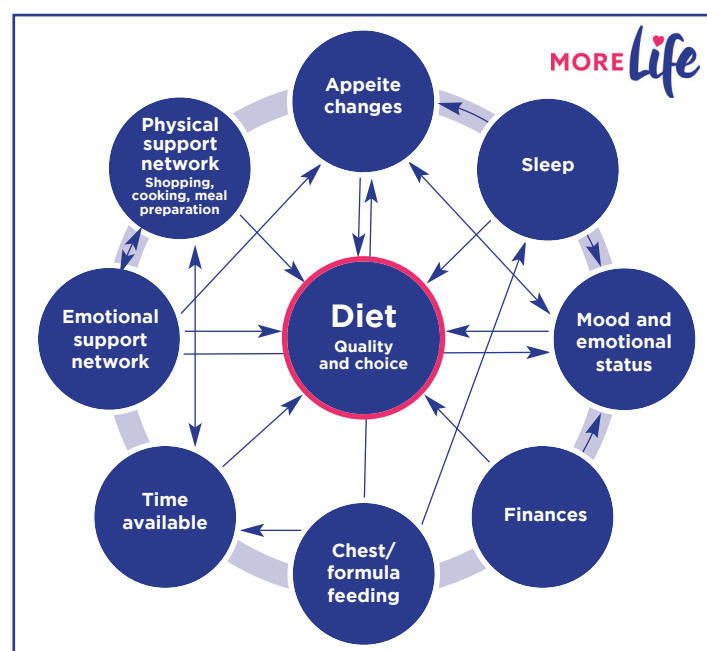
There are lots of reasons women may find it challenging to lose weight within two years of giving birth. During this time many women will experience difficulty with their mental health which can directly impact their motivation to monitor, or make changes to, their lifestyle. Mild to severe mental health problems are common in this population, which means many women may benefit from direct mental health support prior to receiving support for postnatal weight management. The years after a birth are also a time many women, and families, feel their whole world revolves around their new baby. It is understandable that families may already be overwhelmed with lifestyle, financial and behavioural changes during this period – along with the inevitable challenges around timekeeping and getting enough sleep. These factors can make it challenging for them to commit to services and programmes. It can be burdensome to dedicate the time and energy needed to bring about the behavioural change required for weight loss, including dietary changes, increased physical activity and daily self-monitoring.

**Figure 1** demonstrates common factors that frequently present as barriers to dietary improvements because of their intricate and complex relationships.<sup>5</sup>

Once an individual, or family, are ready to make changes to reduce their weight, how can we best support them? We at MoreLife believe it is important for health professionals to explore and understand people's circumstances and offer tailored, individualised, support which focuses on realistic and sustainable change. Person-centred support can gently encourage parents to understand why making small changes could be of benefit to them e.g., the link between diet and mood, the importance of hydration, especially when breastfeeding/chest feeding. Enhancing nutritional awareness and translating guidance into practical application may significantly increase the potential for positive behaviour change to take place.

MoreLife is committed to furthering our understanding of OWM through research and the delivery of our programme. We continue to apply our findings and experience to drive intervention development and support that will effectively benefit this population.

**Figure 1: Factors contributing to postnatal dietary intakes**



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