

The Latest on Exercise during Pregnancy...

Home Birth Midwifery Service ~ excerpted from www.Mercola.com



Maternal health practitioners should recommend low to moderate levels of exercise to their pregnant patients, even if they have not exercised prior to pregnancy, according to a new report.

Exercise can strengthen and improve overall musculoskeletal and physiologic health as well as pregnancy related symptoms.

Exercise such as aerobics, impact and nonimpact activities, resistance training and swimming:

- **Eases back and other musculoskeletal pain**
- **Lowers maternal blood pressure**
- **Reduces swelling**
- **Improves post-partum mood, including sadness**

Sources:

[Eurekalert August 3, 2009](#)

[Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons August 2009; 17\(8\):504-14](#)

It should come as no surprise to find out that exercising during pregnancy is helpful both for you and your baby. After all, exercise is an essential element of a comprehensive physical and mental health program.

Timing and Intensity of Your Program May Affect Nutrient Intake and Birth Weight

Previous studies have shown that, in general, women who exercise throughout their pregnancies have larger placentas than their more sedentary peers. The volume of your placenta is a general marker of its ability to transport oxygen and nutrients to your fetus, so it stands to reason that having a large, healthy placenta will lead to a healthier baby.

However, they also found that women who exercised *at the same rate throughout their pregnancy*, or *boosted the intensity of their exercise regimen later in pregnancy*, gave birth to infants who were lighter and had less body fat than women who slowed down in the final trimester.

That said, none of the babies born to women who exercised moderately or intensely through the ninth month were considered low birth weight. (Low birth weight is associated with developmental problems in childhood and may be linked to heart disease and other health problems later in life.) The findings, published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* in 2002, indicated that regular weight-bearing exercise is beneficial for both mother and baby, and that the amount of benefit varies with the timing and amount of your exercise.

In short, if you are healthy and your pregnancy is normal, regular exercise can do nothing but improve your and your baby's health. Avoiding physical movement for fear of causing harm is contra-intuitive and not based on reality, unless you have some form of medical condition that is putting your pregnancy at risk.

What's a Healthy Amount of Exercise During Pregnancy?

As just mentioned above, the amount of benefit has been found to vary with the *timing* and *amount* of exercise. Slowing down a little during your ninth month may be beneficial, but what about the amount of exercise?

How much exercise is the “right” amount?

Previous research has found that exercising either too much or too little can raise your risk of having a low birth weight baby.

According to one previous study published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, pregnant women who exercised **three to four times a week** seemed to have the best chance of having a healthy weight baby. Exercising more than four times a week, or less than three, was linked to lower birth weight (but not dangerously low birth weight).

As specified in the study above, particularly beneficial exercises during pregnancy include:

- **Aerobics**
- **Both impact and nonimpact activities**
- **Resistance training (weight training)**
- **Swimming**

Avoid Back Pain and Leg Cramps with Regular Exercise

For years, expectant mothers have considered back pain, hip soreness and leg cramps to be more or less unavoidable during pregnancy. But research suggests that these aches and pains can be avoided with proper conditioning and physical exercise.

When you are pregnant you're carrying around extra weight and your weight distribution is altered. Therefore, your muscles must work harder to accomplish your normal gait pattern when you walk. Exercising during your pregnancy will help keep your muscles conditioned to handle the increasing weight, and can be very beneficial for both preventive and rehabilitative management.

As a result of the decrease in aches and pains, this practice will likely also reduce the amount of pain-relief drugs taken during pregnancy. This, in and of itself, is good, considering that no drugs have been 100 percent proven to be safe during pregnancy.

Other Health Benefits of Exercising During Pregnancy

Aside from optimizing your baby's nutrient supply and avoiding annoying aches and pains during pregnancy, exercising during this time has other health benefits, including:

- **Reduced risk of gallstones**, which is a fairly common problem for many pregnant women. Serious cases may even require surgical intervention, which is far more risky during pregnancy.
- **Reduced risk of preterm birth**: The risk of delivering a baby during the first 37 weeks of pregnancy, known as preterm birth, has been found to be reduced in women who engage in vigorous activity such as jogging or bicycling.

All-Natural Post Partum Depression Relief

Depression and mood-swings are common phenomena that affect many pregnant women. Changes in your hormone levels, and physical/emotional/mental stresses related to all the changes that are currently taking place in your life are contributing factors.

Even if you're elated about being pregnant, depression may still affect you, and may take you completely by surprise.

In recent years, conventional medicine has started prescribing antidepressants to pregnant women, both as a preventive measure and as treatment. This is a major mistake that can cause significant harm both to you and your unborn child.

Fortunately, exercise is one of your most effective tools for mental- and emotional health as well. Dr. James S. Gordon, a world-renowned expert in using mind-body medicine to heal depression and anxiety, states that physical movement can:

- **Improve your mood**
- **Relieve your anxiety**
- **Alleviate your symptoms of depression**

So sticking to your exercise regimen while you are pregnant can go a long way to insulate you from the pre and postpartum depression episodes that plague so many pregnant women. Numerous studies have found that exercise is at least as good as, or better, than antidepressants for depression.

The main reason for this is because physical exercise changes the level of serotonin in your brain. It also increases your levels of endorphins, your “feel good” hormones. If you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, take this advice to heart and exercise, not just for you, but also for the benefit of your baby.