Physical Activity in Women During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period

Physical activity during pregnancy benefts a woman’s overall health. Moderate-intensity physical activity by healthy women during pregnancy increases or maintains cardiorespiratory ftness, reduces the risk of excessive weight gain and gestational diabetes, and reduces symptoms of postpartum depression. Reduced risk of excessive weight gain during pregnancy can also reduce the risk of excessive postpartum weight retention, future obesity, and an infant born with high birth weight. Strong scientifc evidence shows that the risks of moderate-intensity activity done by healthy women during pregnancy are very low, and do not increase risk of low birth weight, preterm delivery, or early pregnancy loss. Some evidence suggests that physical activity may reduce the risk of pregnancy complications, such as preeclampsia, reduce the length of labor and postpartum recovery, and reduce the risk of having a Cesarean section.

During a normal postpartum period, regular physical activity continues to beneft a woman’s overall health. Studies show that moderate-intensity physical activity during the period following the birth of a child increases a woman’s cardiorespiratory ftness and improves her mood. Such activity does not appear to have adverse effects on breast milk volume, breast milk composition, or infant growth.

Physical activity also helps women achieve and maintain a healthy weight during the postpartum period and, when combined with caloric restriction, helps promote weight loss.

Key Guidelines for Women During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period

Women should do at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Preferably, aerobic activity should be spread throughout the week.

Women who habitually engaged in vigorous-intensity aerobic activity or who were physically active before pregnancy can continue these activities during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Women who are pregnant should be under the care of a health care provider who can monitor the progress of the pregnancy.

Women who are pregnant can consult their health care provider about whether or how to adjust their physical activity during pregnancy and after the baby is born.

Explaining the Key Guidelines

Women who are pregnant should be under the care of a health care provider with whom they can discuss whether or how to adjust their physical activity during pregnancy and after the baby is born. Unless a woman has medical reasons to avoid physical activity during pregnancy or the postpartum period, she can begin or continue light- to moderate-intensity aerobic and muscle-strengthening physical activity. When beginning physical activity during pregnancy, women should increase the amount of physical activity gradually over time.

Women who habitually did vigorous-intensity activity or a lot of aerobic or muscle-strengthening physical activity before pregnancy can continue to be physically active during pregnancy and after giving birth. They generally do not need to drastically reduce their activity levels, provided that they remain healthy and discuss with their health care provider whether and how to adjust activity levels during this time.

During pregnancy, perceived exertion is often a better indicator of intensity than heart rate or estimated absolute energy requirements of specifc activities. On a rating-of-perceived-exertion scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is sitting and 10 is the greatest effort possible, moderate-intensity activity would be an effort of 5 to 6. Another way to gauge moderate intensity is with a talk test, where carrying on a conversation (but not singing) is still possible.

Women should avoid doing exercises that involve lying on their back after the frst trimester of pregnancy because this position can restrict blood fow to the uterus and fetus. They should also avoid participating in contact or collision sports and activities with high risk of falling or abdominal trauma, such as soccer, basketball, horseback riding, or downhill skiing.

<https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/healthy-pregnant-or-postpartum-women.html>

Pregnant & Postpartum Activity: An Overview

Can I be physically active while pregnant and after I have my baby?

Yes! If you are a healthy pregnant or postpartum woman, physical activity is good for your overall health. For example, moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, keeps your heart and lungs healthy during and after pregnancy. Physical activity also helps improve your mood throughout pregnancy and after birth. After you have your baby, exercise also helps maintain a healthy weight, and when combined with healthy eating, it helps with weight loss.

Can I break up my physical activity throughout the week?

Yes! You don’t have to do it all at once. Aim for 150 minutes of aerobic physical activity a week, but you can break it up into smaller chunks of time (for example, 30 minutes 5 days a week). As long as your aerobic physical activity is a moderate or vigorous effort, any amount of time counts toward meeting the aerobic guideline.

Is physical activity during pregnancy risky?

According to scientific evidence, the risks of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, such as brisk walking, are very low for healthy pregnant women. Physical activity does not increase your chances of low birth weight, early delivery, or early pregnancy loss.

What should I keep in mind?

Unless you have a medical reason to avoid physical activity during or after your pregnancy, you can begin or continue moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity.