

Role of Maternal Exercise in Enhancing Maternal Health

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DESCRIPTION

Exercise during pregnancy is not just a benefit but a necessity for many mothers. Regular physical activity has implications for both maternal and fetal health, contributing to a smoother pregnancy, improved labor outcomes and a healthier postpartum recovery. Maternal exercise helps mothers maintain a healthy weight, reduce the risk of gestational diabetes and manage pregnancy-related hypertension. Engaging in physical activity can enhance cardiovascular fitness, strengthen muscles and improve overall stamina, which is beneficial for handling the physical demands of pregnancy.

Exercise is known to boost mood and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. During pregnancy, hormonal changes and the anticipation of childbirth can contribute to emotional stress. Regular physical activity releases endorphins, which can improve mood, reduce stress and promote overall mental well-being. Many pregnant women experience difficulties with sleep due to physical discomfort and hormonal fluctuations. Engaging in moderate exercise can help improve sleep quality and reduce insomnia, leading to more restful nights and better overall energy levels.

Regular exercise can alleviate common pregnancy discomforts such as back pain, constipation and swelling. Strengthening the core and pelvic muscles through exercise helps support the growing belly and alleviates pressure on the lower back, while physical activity promotes healthy digestion and reduces fluid retention. Exercise can improve muscle tone and flexibility, which are beneficial for labor and delivery. Activities such as pelvic floor exercises and stretching can enhance endurance and facilitate easier labor. Additionally, being physically fit can help women recover more quickly postpartum. Before starting or continuing an exercise routine during pregnancy, it is essential for mothers to consult with their healthcare provider. This ensures that the chosen activities are safe and appropriate based on individual health conditions and pregnancy progress. Low-impact exercises are generally recommended during pregnancy. Safe activities include the following.

- Walking in a simple, effective way to maintain cardiovascular fitness.

- Swimming provides a full-body workout while reducing pressure on joints and ligaments.
- Prenatal yoga enhances flexibility, reduces stress and promotes relaxation.
- Stationary cycling offers a good cardiovascular workout with minimal joint impact.

Incorporating light strength training can be beneficial, focusing on exercises that strengthen major muscle groups. Using resistance bands or light weights helps maintain muscle tone without excessive strain. It is important to avoid heavy lifting and exercises that require lying flat on the back after the first trimester. Pelvic floor exercises, such as Kegels, help strengthen the muscles that support the uterus, bladder and rectum. These exercises can improve bladder control, reduce the risk of incontinence and facilitate easier delivery and recovery. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week, as recommended by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). This can be divided into 30-minute sessions, five days a week. It is necessary to listen to your body and adjust the intensity and duration of exercise based on comfort and energy levels.

Safety considerations

Certain activities should be avoided during pregnancy, including those with a high risk of falling or trauma, such as skiing, scuba diving and contact sports. Additionally, exercises that involve lying flat on the back after the first trimester or excessive abdominal exercises should be modified or avoided. Staying hydrated and maintaining proper nutrition is vital when engaging in physical activity. Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise and ensure you are consuming a balanced diet to support both maternal and fetal health.

It is important to be aware of any warning signs that may indicate potential complications. These include severe abdominal pain, dizziness, shortness of breath or contractions. If any of these symptoms occur, stop exercising immediately and consult a healthcare provider. As pregnancy progresses, physical changes may necessitate adjustments in exercise routines. Modifications may include altering the intensity, duration or type of exercise to accommodate growing belly and changing body dynamics.

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Received: 29-Nov-2024, Manuscript No. MPN-24-33801; **Editor assigned:** 02-Dec-2024, PreQC No. MPN-24-33801 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 16-Dec-2024, QC No. MPN-24-33801; **Revised:** 23-Dec-2024, Manuscript No. MPN-24-33801 (R); **Published:** 30-Dec-2024, DOI: 10.35248/2472-1182.24.9.245

Citation: Jain S (2024). Role of Maternal Exercise in Enhancing Maternal Health. *Matern Pediatr Nutr.* 9:245.

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Postpartum exercise

- After childbirth, gradually reintroducing exercise can support postpartum recovery. Begin with gentle activities, such as walking and pelvic floor exercises and gradually increase intensity as physical strength and endurance improve.
 - Exercise can aid in managing postpartum weight, improving cardiovascular health and enhancing overall well-being. It is also beneficial for alleviating symptoms of postpartum depression and promoting mental health.
- Before resuming or starting a new exercise routine postpartum, it is advisable to consult with a healthcare provider to ensure readiness and receive guidance on safe and effective practices.