

Physical Therapy and Exercise During and After Pregnancy

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During Pregnancy

During pregnancy, women experience structural and hormonal changes which influence the efficiency of the body, fluid volumes and weight distribution changes which can lead to issues such as low back pain, sacroiliac joint dysfunction, carpal tunnel syndrome, plantar fasciitis and other diagnoses. Physical therapy can often times help with these issues and promote safe, healthy activities during pregnancy.



Exercise Recommendations

According to Wolfe and Davies^{1,2}, women who are pregnant should exercise for equal to or greater than 30 minutes most days of the week at a light to moderate intensity. Studies also show a reduction in back pain^{1,3}, improved sleep^{1,4}, improved glycemic control in gestational diabetes^{1,5}, and perceived lifestyle and pregnancy benefits¹. In a qualitative study published in the Physical Therapy Journal in August 2014, women who exercised during pregnancy perceived a positive impact on body and mind, reduced pregnancy-related problems, increased confidence, control and positive effects on lifestyle and healthy living.

PT and Pregnancy

Physical therapy is a safe and effective option for pain management both during pregnancy and post-partum. Treatment methods may include light resistive training, light to moderate cardiovascular exercise, positioning to alleviate symptoms, aquatic therapy, manual therapy techniques, taping for stabilization and pain, sacroiliac bracing to support the pelvis and education on safe exercise after pregnancy. Certain patients may benefit from a supervised gradual return to physical activity 6 weeks post-partum, including pelvic floor exercises, core and pelvic stabilization exercises, lifting techniques and education for appropriate exercise training, in which physical therapy may be a practical choice.

1. Fieril KP, Olsen MF, Glantz A, and Larsson M. Experiences of exercise during pregnancy among women who perform regular resistance training: a qualitative study. *Phys Ther.* 2014; 94 (8): 1135-1143.
2. Wolfe LA, Davies GA. Canadian guidelines for exercise in pregnancy. *Clin Obstet Gynecol.* 2003; 46: 488-495.
3. ACOG Committee Opinion No. 267, January 2002: exercise during pregnancy and the postpartum period. *Obstet Gynecol.* 2002; 99:171-173.
4. Garshasbi A, Faghhi Zadeh S. The effect of exercise on the intensity of low back pain in pregnant women. *Int J Gynaecol Obstet.* 2005; 88:271-275.
5. Youngstedt SD. Effects of exercise on sleep. *Clin Sports Med.* 2005; 24: 355-365, xi.