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IN THE NEWS

'Pregnant women should be encouraged to engage in regular exercise': Working out improves mood and reduces fatigue

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Irritable pregnant women who are prone to bouts of fatigue are being encouraged to take up more exercise.

A Psychology And Health report has found exercise may improve the mood of expectant mothers and help to reduce levels of tiredness. Researchers sent previously inactive pregnant women on a four week exercise intervention programme and found they reported significant improvements in their mood during the course.

The study, by Anca Gaston and Harry Prapavessis at the University of Western Ontario, also saw reduced levels of fatigue.

Researchers found irritable and tired pregnant women found improvements in their mood after exercising.

The suggestion is that pregnant women should be encouraged to engage in regular exercise to improve both psychological and physical well-being.

While postpartum mood disorders like postnatal depression are widely recognized, rates of depression, anxiety and fatigue are actually higher during pregnancy than following pregnancy, reported Science Daily.

The authors highlight that children of mothers who are depressed or anxious during pregnancy have higher cortisol levels at birth and adolescence, impaired cognition skills and greater risk of developmental and mental disorders.

In addition, fatigue during pregnancy has been associated with increased risk of caesarean delivery, disturbed sleep, and a negative impact on physical and mental health. Therefore effective interventions, such as the one looked at in this study, may have numerous health benefits. Children of mothers who are depressed or anxious during pregnancy have higher cortisol levels.

While this study looked at a short-term intervention programme, the positive results suggest that exercising during pregnancy improves both physical and psychological health.

Furthermore, research from 2010 found babies whose mothers did aerobic exercise during pregnancy may have healthier hearts. The pioneering study showed that those babies have significantly lower heart rates.

'Due to misconceptions regarding the safety of exercise during pregnancy, continued efforts to educate families and professionals about the guidelines, benefits and barriers are needed'

Researchers believe 'womb workouts' have health benefits that continue into adulthood, lowering the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and hypertension decades later.

The heart is a muscle and, like other muscles, becomes stronger through conditioning. And if it is stronger, the heart rate will drop, so that the heart puts less effort into pumping the same amount of blood.

'A regular exercise programme during pregnancy may be the earliest intervention to improve cardiovascular health,' says Dr Linda May of Kansas University, who led the study.

The authors of the Western Ontario study conclude by stating that, due to misconceptions regarding the safety of exercise during pregnancy 'continued efforts to educate women, their families and prenatal health professionals about current guidelines and the benefits and barriers associated with exercise during pregnancy are needed'.