Medical Xpress

Perth women manage gestational diabetes with exercise

March 28 2014, by Denise Cahill

Many women with gestational diabetes were unsure about what exercise to do in pregnancy and what was safe. Credit: Eric Borglet

Pregnant women diagnosed with gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) are better able to manage the condition and symptoms with home-based exercise.

The study done by researchers from UWA's School of Sport Science, Exercise and Health and the School of Women's and Infants' Health worked with 40 women who had been diagnosed with GDM over a six week period.

Lead investigator Dr Rhiannon Halse says management of women diagnosed with GDM centres on diet but there is very little advice about using exercise to manage the condition.

"We found that many women were very unsure about what exercise to do in pregnancy and what was safe," she says.

"We thought if we could show that a home-based exercise program was beneficial for the management of GDM then that could be integrated into routine chat to the women."

Participants were 28 weeks pregnant and all were attending King Edward Hospital's diabetes centre.

They were split into two groups; one kept their normal routine while the other took part in a cycling-based home exercise program.

Researchers visited the group doing the cycling exercise program three times a week and tested their glucose levels daily.

They found the thrice weekly hour-long cycling sessions on a stationary bike helped to lower participants' daily glucose profiles.

"Compared to non-exercising women, women who exercised had lower overall glucose profiles which is obviously very beneficial for women who have a problem controlling their glucose levels," she says.

"They are better able to control their sugar levels so that way it prevents

them going on insulin therapy.

She says while the women improved their aerobic fitness, it also had benefits for their mental health and they had a more stable diet.

"They didn't restrict their diet as much so those glucose changes which were beneficial on the back of having a bit more leeway with their diet," she says.

"The control [group's] diet had to be stricter with their diet."

Ms Halse hopes as a result of the study, women diagnosed with GDM will be educated about incorporating exercise throughout their pregnancy.

"My goal would be to have an exercise physiologist employed as well as a diabetes educator and nutritionist to work with the women," she says.

"We have shown it is just as important as nutrition."

The study will be published in *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* journal later this year.

Provided by Science Network WA

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