

Three in four women below recommended exercise levels during pregnancy, research shows

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(Medical Xpress) -- The majority of women in Ireland do not reach the recommended levels of exercise during pregnancy, according to new research.

Figures published in the *International Journal of [Gynaecology](#) and [Obstetrics](#)* show that three in four women (76%) in Ireland fail to engage in moderate [physical activity](#) (brisk or easy walking) for 30 minutes or more on at least five occasions a week during their pregnancy.

They also reveal that one in ten women (12%) in Ireland engage in no [physical exercise](#) at all while pregnant.

According to the researchers who conducted the study, many women, and some healthcare professionals, believe that [exercise](#) during pregnancy may be potentially harmful to mother and baby, and this, they suggest, is a likely cause for the shortfalls in the recommended levels of exercise.

“There are significant benefits to mild and moderate exercise while pregnant, however strenuous exercise during pregnancy should be avoided as it has been linked to preterm birth and low birth weight,” explains Fionnuala McAuliffe, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the UCD School of Medicine and Medical Science, University College Dublin, and the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, Dublin, who led the study.

“Regular exercise during pregnancy helps better prepare women for labour and delivery, and may also offer long-term benefits for the baby.”

“Moderate exercise during pregnancy helps reduce the risk of pre-eclampsia and gestational diabetes, less gestational weight gain and less somatic complaints, including insomnia and low mood,” adds Professor McAuliffe.

“Obstetricians, GPs and all health care professionals should be educated regarding the benefits of physical activity in pregnancy and be encouraged to educate patients about the benefits to them and their baby,” says Dr Jennifer Walsh, Clinical Research Fellow at University College Dublin and the National Maternity Hospital, who co-authored the study.

Figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) show that 73,996 children were born in Ireland in 2008, the highest fertility rate across all 27 EU member states.

The study “Prevalence of physical activity among healthy pregnant women in Ireland” involved 358 [women](#) during early [pregnancy](#).

More information: www.bjog.org/view/0/index.html

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