

Tired, moody and pregnant? Exercise may be the answer

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Exercise may improve the mood of pregnant women and help to reduce levels of fatigue reports new research published in *Psychology & Health*. The study, by Anca Gaston and Harry Prapavessis at the University of Western Ontario, examined whether a four week exercise intervention programme would result in improvements in the psychological well-being of previously inactive pregnant women. The results were clear, with participants reporting significant improvements in their mood during the programme. They also saw reduced levels of fatigue, suggesting 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 recognised, rates of depression, anxiety and fatigue are actually higher during pregnancy than following pregnancy.

Possible complications resulting from depression during pregnancy include:

- Insufficient weight gain;
- Increased substance use;
- Premature birth;
- Small babies; and,
- Reduced intention to breastfeed.

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.

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

More information: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08870446.2013.809084

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