

Research confirms exercising during pregnancy is good for mother and baby

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Spanish researchers have clarified doubts over the physical activity recommended during pregnancy. Their work highlights how exercise should be taken not only by healthy, previously active women, but that it

is also a good time to adopt a healthy lifestyle. There are clear advantages for both the mother and baby.

Excessive weight gain, pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes, caesarean section, lower back pain and [urinary incontinence](#) are some of the risks of leading an unhealthy lifestyle during [pregnancy](#).

A study carried out by experts from Camilo José Cela University (UCJC), published in the *Journal of American Medicine Association (JAMA)*, defines the [physical exercise](#) patterns during pregnancy which have shown major physiological benefits for both mother and baby.

"The percentage of women who meet the recommendations for exercise during pregnancy is very low," SINC was told by María Perales, the lead author of the study and a researcher from the department of Physical Activity and Sports Science. "This is due in part to uncertainty about what type of exercise should be recommended and which should be avoided".

However, the new study confirms that there is strong scientific evidence maintaining that moderate exercise during pregnancy is safe and beneficial for both mother and baby.

Among the confirmed benefits are: the prevention of [excessive weight gain](#) (a key factor in the intergenerational transmission of obesity) and a lower risk of foetal macrosomia (babies who are born weighing more than 4 kilograms), pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes, [caesarean section](#), [lower back pain](#), pelvic pain and urinary incontinence.

Moreover, there is no risk of premature birth, [low birth weight](#) or foetal distress; provided that the mother has no medical or obstetric contraindication for physical exercise.

"The exercises recommended in our study should be performed not only by healthy pregnant women, but also by sedentary females prior to pregnancy since this is a good time to adopt a physically active lifestyle," adds Perales. "This also goes for women at risk of being overweight or obese or at risk of [gestational diabetes](#) and chronic hypertension".

What physical exercise is recommended?

In accordance with the recommendations by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the new study highlights the [physical activity](#) patterns which have proven to be most beneficial during this period, as well as the exercises which these women should avoid as they might pose a risk to the foetus.

With regards to the type of exercise, duration and weekly frequency, the experts stress the importance of combining aerobic and strength training in each session, which should last 45 to 65 minutes, over three or four days a week.

The intensity should always be moderate, although it should be analysed for each woman and controlled throughout the session. Physical activity can be started between week 9 and 12 of pregnancy (after the first prenatal visit) until week 38-39.

Techniques such as pilates and yoga, often recommended during this period, are not linked to the physiological benefits described, but to improvements in mental health and pain reduction.

In terms of [exercise](#) which should be avoided, "all that which is strenuous (90% of maximum heart rate), since it may increase the risk of hypothermia, dehydration or reduced uterine blood flow with the associated risk of compromising the foetus' health," Perales stresses.

Similarly, long-distance running, intense weight and isometric contraction training, jumps, impact exercises and exercises with risk of falling or in an outstretched supine position (lying on your back) must be suspended.

More information: María Perales et al. Exercise During Pregnancy, *JAMA* (2017). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2017.0593](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2017.0593)

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