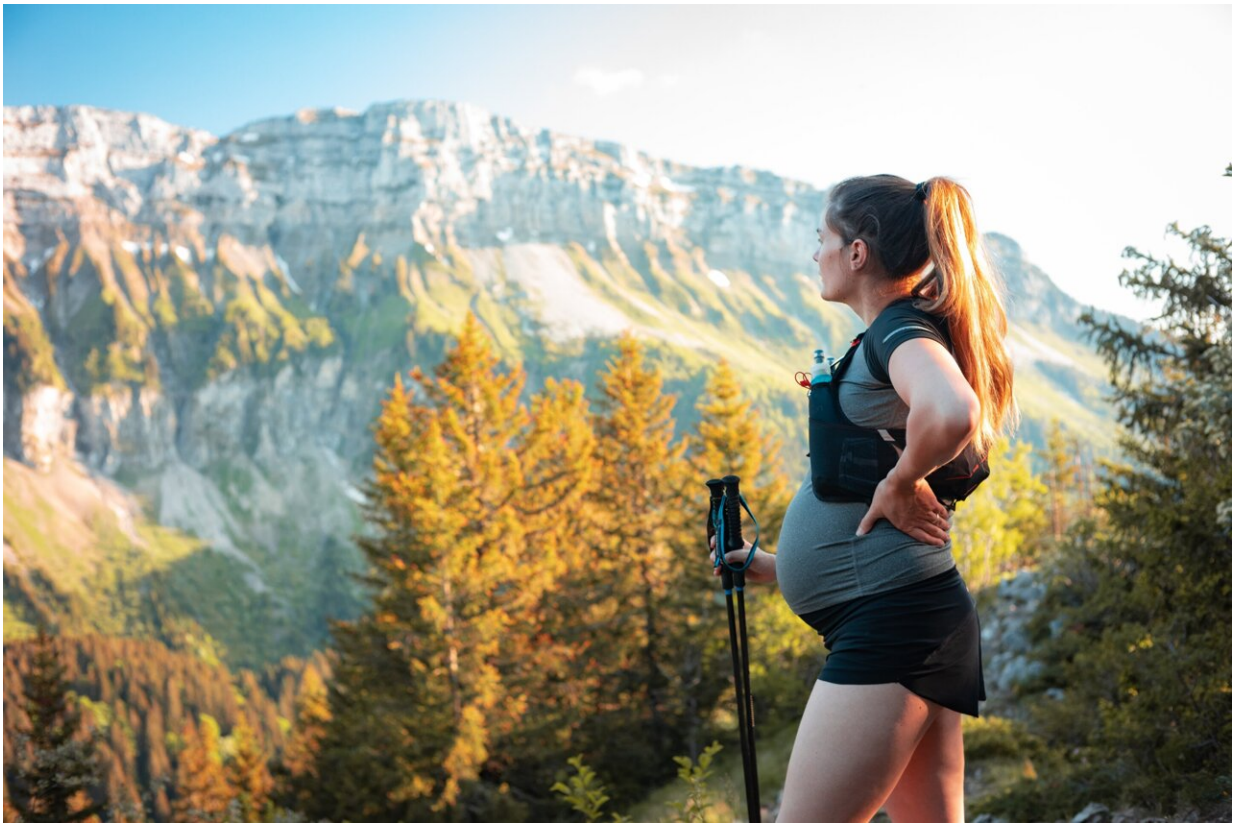


New evidence shows the importance of healthy lifestyle programs in pregnancy

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Healthy lifestyle programs in pregnancy support mums to achieve healthier pregnancies and improve health outcomes Monash University research shows.

The [systematic review](#) incorporated 34,546 pregnancies and highlighted that supporting mums-to-be with a structured, healthy lifestyle [program](#) that provides structured, evidence-based [health information](#), advice and guidance from professionals about [healthy eating](#) and [physical activity](#) during this priority life stage, helps achieve a healthier pregnancy and significantly improves pregnancy complications.

This also has a cost-saving benefit for hospitals and the [health](#) care system, resulting in less costly interventions such as caesarean sections and fewer admissions for babies to neonatal intensive care units. This has the potential to save our system up to \$AUD0.5B per year.

Most mums know they need extra nutritional intake in pregnancy, but the concept of "eating for two" and "resting up" no longer stands them in good stead. Around half of all pregnant women in developed countries and increasingly in developing countries, struggle to balance dietary intake and physical activity, gaining above the healthy recommended weight in pregnancy.

This increases the risk of complications including gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, premature birth, unnecessary cesarean sections and also brings long-term health risks for women and their children.

The research also showed that healthy lifestyle programs are effective for all mums regardless of what weight they enter pregnancy and focus on supporting a healthy lifestyle and don't focus on weight and are a powerful tool in supporting mums to be the healthiest they can in pregnancy.

The findings were published today in the international journal *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

The study, led by Professor Helena Teede, Director of the Monash

Centre for Health Research and Implementation (MCHRI) at Monash University, and endocrinologist at Monash Health, said: "We've long known the importance of a healthy lifestyle in pregnancy, but this global evidence highlights the critical need for these interventions to be accessible during routine pregnancy care and the impact they can have on improving health outcomes.

"Providing resources and weight monitoring alone was not enough to improve outcomes for mums and babies. Only when structured diet and physical activity support programs were delivered, did we see the health benefits."

Dr. Cheryce Harrison, senior author and co-lead of the Healthy Lifestyle Stream at MCHRI, said: "With funding already secured from the Victorian Government, we are actively working to see these evidence-based programs, delivered by dedicated trained health professionals, available and integrated into routine care for all pregnant women.

"We are now working with the Government to ensure national guidelines reflect this best practice evidence and are aiming to make these programs accessible to Australian women, no matter where they live, and to access pregnancy care."

Optimal-Me, a healthy [lifestyle](#) program delivered by health professionals, includes support, health information, advice and guidance for [pregnant women](#)'s physical and mental health and wellbeing from preconception, pregnancy to after birth. Led by Dr. Harrison, this has supported 250 women and was highly valued by all participants.

Prue Cummings, a first-time mum to now eight-week-old Henry, joined the Optimal-Me program pre-conception.

"I found Optimal-Me very supportive. It's an opportunity to chat, and a

space to ask all my questions, with the confidence that I was getting the right health advice. This was really important to me," she said.

"It's a one-stop-shop to understand vitamins, vaccinations, healthy foods and exercise. It gave me all the hints and tips and was overall extremely useful. My pregnancy with Henry was a really good and healthy [pregnancy](#), and I'm grateful for a very healthy baby."

More information: Helena J. Teede et al, Association of Antenatal Diet and Physical Activity–Based Interventions With Gestational Weight Gain and Pregnancy Outcomes, *JAMA Internal Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2021.6373](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2021.6373)

Provided by Monash University

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