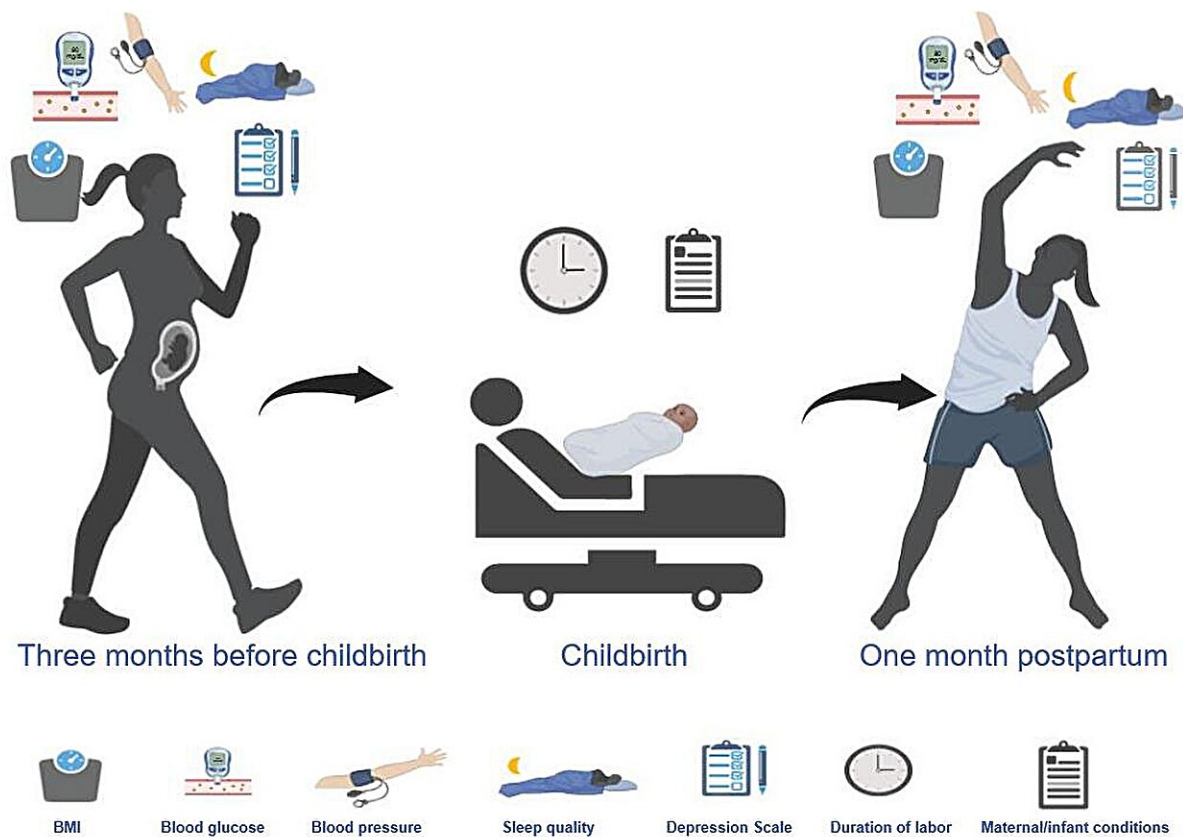


# Moderate regular exercise found to alleviate some symptoms of postpartum depression

November 30 2023, by Bob Yirka



Exercise status of women three months before childbirth and one month postpartum. It is important that pregnant women engage in proactive and moderate exercise to improve their physical and mental well-being. Credit: Xu et al., CC-BY 4.0 ([creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/))

Via meta-analysis of prior studies, a small team of physical education researchers at China University of Geosciences has found that engaging in moderate, regular exercise can alleviate symptoms of postpartum depression in some women. In their study, [reported](#) in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE*, the group analyzed 26 prior studies to learn more about the impact of exercise on women experiencing post-partum depression.

Postpartum depression is a [mood disorder](#) associated with women after giving birth. Prior research has suggested that between 50% and 75% of all women experience some degree of depressive symptoms after giving birth and 10% to 15% experience symptoms serious enough to be diagnosed as [postpartum depression](#). The disorder has also been found to include more than just depressive symptoms; many women also experience anxiety, sleep disturbances and extreme mood swings.

Over the years, medical scientists have developed therapies to reduce symptoms, but most have undesirable side effects. Many researchers have looked into [alternative therapies](#) that do not involve the use of drugs. Many such approaches have focused on exercise as a means of reducing symptoms.

Research suggests that exercise may help, the researchers on this new effort note, but not enough work has been done to single out which types work best, or how much is required. To find answers to these questions, they studied the results of 26 research efforts centered on the impact of aerobic exercise on postpartum depression, along with the types involved and duration.

The research team found that overall, engaging in [aerobic exercise](#) tended to help most women experiencing postpartum depression. They noted that jogging, walking and swimming all showed positive effects. All three increase breathing and [heart rate](#), promote blood flow, and

perhaps most importantly, increase neurotransmitter levels in the brain.

They also found that exercise conducted in groups tended to reduce symptoms better than when exercising alone. And finally, they found that the most beneficial regimen involved exercising moderately for between 35 and 45 minutes, three to four times a week.

**More information:** Hao Xu et al, Effectiveness of aerobic exercise in the prevention and treatment of postpartum depression: Meta-analysis and network meta-analysis, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0287650](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287650)

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