

# The impact of confinement on pregnant women

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Researchers of Medicine and Physical Therapy at the CEU Cardenal Herrera University of Valencia and of the Italian University of Catania, have published the results of the first study on the effects of confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic among pregnant Spanish women. A total 90 women took part in the study. The decrease in general physical activity and the higher number of hours sitting down have had the greatest effect on the lifestyle of pregnant women, derived from the mobility restrictions implemented during the confinement.

The online questionnaire produced by researchers from the CEU UCH and Catania, based on several internationally-validated tests, was filled out by 90 participants between May 18 and 30, two months since the [confinement](#) began. The questions of the questionnaire were designed to compare eating habits and physical activity and inactivity before and during the confinement, in order to detect changes to the style and quality of life linked to the health of [pregnant women](#) caused by the enforced restrictions.

## Less physical activity

Among the results, which have just been published in scientific journal *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, the figure that stands out is a 30% decrease in moderate physical activity, and 60% less time devoted to walking. Among the obstacles to exercise, the pregnant [women](#) who took part point to a lack of space as the main cause, fatigue caused by the pregnancy or considering that physical exercise was not a priority in their condition.

As highlighted by the professor of the Department of Physical Therapy of the CEU UCH Gemma Biviá, member of the research team, "physical inactivity and a lack of exercise are harmful for anyone, but especially in the case of pregnant women, who are encouraged to do at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week. On average, the amount of physical exercise carried out by the pregnant women who took part in the study went from 94 minutes a week before the pandemic, to 68 during the confinement, in both cases less than the recommended levels."

## Walking 60% less

The study also reveals that a majority of pregnant women choose to walk as the main source of exercise, and confinement has prevented continuing with this type of physical activity to a large extent. "The time allocated to walking decreased from 98 to 38 minutes on average a week, which represents almost 60% less, due to the measures that are especially restrictive for conducting [physical activity](#) outdoors in Spain. This change in routines, together with increased anxiety and fear of contagion, has had negative effects on the quality of life of pregnant women," highlights professor Biviá.

Furthermore, 52.2% of the women who participated

in the research had to stop going to their childbirth lessons, which were canceled during this period. Only 24.4% of participants were able to continue with this preparation with remote sessions over the internet.

### **The diet, with hardly any changes**

Along with [exercise](#), another factor that affects quality of life are eating habits, which could have been affected by the stress linked to the confinement or the difficulty to buy fresh products. However, the study's results show that there were hardly any alterations to eating patterns among pregnant women: they were able to follow the same diet while in confinement.

Professor Gemma Biviá says, "This fact is important, as the stressful situation generated by confinement could have led to anxiety behaviors due to the food, especially the excessive consumption of sugary foods. This type of food increases the levels of serotonin, and thus the feeling of well-being, but also increases the risk of suffering certain diseases such as excess weight, obesity, gestational diabetes or cardiovascular diseases, and can also cause fetal macrosomia, excessive weight for the child during childbirth." However, the Mediterranean diet pattern, the most advisable to prevent these complications among pregnant women, only reached the advised levels in a third of all pregnant women who took part in this study.

### **More online tools**

In light of the results obtained, the authors of the study suggest developing tools that are available online and which are specific to promote healthy lifestyle habits, [physical exercise](#) and childbirth preparation at home, as well as decreasing stress and anxiety, ahead of possible future situations of confinement or mobility restrictions. Prior studies in which CEU UCH professor Juan Francisco Lisón took part, show the efficiency of these [online tools](#) on healthy habits among other groups of the population, such as children with obesity.

The study, "Analysis of the Impact of the Confinement Resulting from COVID-19 on the

Lifestyle and Physiological Wellbeing of Spanish Pregnant Women: An Internet-Based Cross-Sectional Survey," was published in August in a special issue of the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

**More information:** Gemma Biviá-Roig et al. Analysis of the Impact of the Confinement Resulting from COVID-19 on the Lifestyle and Psychological Wellbeing of Spanish Pregnant Women: An Internet-Based Cross-Sectional Survey, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph17165933](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17165933)

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