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WORK IT OUT

BEING “WITH CHILD” IS NO LONGER AN EXCUSE TO SIT ON

THE COUCH ALL DAY! PERSONAL TRAINER *Calum Wilson* TALKS

ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE FOR BOTH MUM AND BUB

Let's kick off with the obvious. Nearly half the population have either had, are having or are planning on having a baby at some point in their lives. Considering reproduction is vital in order for the human race to continue, it's baffling that there still seems to be a lack of information when it comes to understanding the physical and mental impacts that having a baby can have on the mother.

There are many factors to consider when preparing for a baby. Nutrition, hydration, sleep, stress and exercise are just a few things that every new mother has to think about. Most people will be aware of the saying *You are what you eat* and this can be directly used for *Your baby is what you eat*. Maintaining a healthy diet and adequate hydration is paramount to having a healthy baby.

THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

Let's focus on the exercise side of pregnancy. A healthy baby comes from a healthy mother. It is relatively easy to access information on the benefits of healthy eating habits during pregnancy (such as minimising alcohol and increasing vitamin and folate levels), but when it comes to equipping yourself with knowledge on the best types of exercise, there is a lot less information available.

This could largely be due to the ongoing fears and preconceptions some people hold about whether pregnant ladies should be working out at all. You only have to look at the reaction of some people when they see a healthy pregnant woman walking into a spin class or a personal training session.

Only 50 years ago, pregnant mums were told to rest up. They were told not to put their body under any stress whatsoever and never to let their heart rate climb over 120bpm. However,

with more studies and better research, we have found there's not a lot of merit in this school of thought. In 2005, the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* highlighted exercise as an effective tool for preventing a decline in physical function and emotional health.

It is important to consult a health practitioner before undergoing any exercise in pregnancy. The type and intensity of exercise you should be doing also varies throughout each trimester, so it is important to consult with a qualified exercise professional throughout to ensure the

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correct program is being followed. The best exercises to start with are walking, swimming, cycling, yoga and Pilates. Aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. You should also consider buying a heart rate monitor to help ensure you are working out in a safe and effective zone.

However, pregnancy probably isn't the time to start running or aerobics if you have been sitting on the couch for the last six months. But if you've been used to doing regular exercise, your body should cope just fine. As your body is already better physically prepared, having a prior fitness regime greatly reduces the risk of complications while pregnant.

Here are six great reasons why you should exercise during your pregnancy:

1 MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT GAIN

The average weight gain during pregnancy should be 10 to 12kg, with around 300 extra daily calories. Although hormones will be going crazy for the first 16 weeks, this shouldn't be an excuse to overindulge by saying, 'It's OK, I'm eating for two.'

The average weight loss during birth will be around five to 7kg, leaving you only a few extra kilos before you are back to your best. Watching the scale inch its way up to numbers you have never seen before can be disheartening. Staying active helps you feel better about yourself and will improve your odds of gaining a healthy amount of weight.

2 STRENGTHEN YOUR PELVIC FLOOR & DECREASE THE CHANCE OF INCONTINENCE

Incontinence is a big problem for some women and can be due to lack of strength in the lower abdominals and pelvic floor muscles. Kegel exercises are an integral part of all prenatal and postnatal programs designed to help strengthen this region.

One in three mothers in Australia experience some form of continence problem. It may not happen immediately after birth, but pregnancy and the birth of a child can have a weakening effect on the important pelvic floor muscles.

For information on how to perform Kegel exercises take a look at beftmom.com or search *Kegel exercise* on youtube.com to see full video demonstrations.

3 DECREASE THE LIKELIHOOD OF POSTNATAL DEPRESSION

Regular exercise can be an efficient way to treat some forms of depression and anxiety. Physical activity causes the brain pleasure centres to be stimulated and leads to feelings of wellbeing. ▷

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Some studies indicate that regular exercise may be as effective as other treatments like medication to relieve milder forms of depression. Generally, exercise has a place in treatment as part of a comprehensive approach to the illness.

4 PREPARE FOR CHILDBIRTH It makes perfect sense – the better shape you’re in, the stronger you’ll be come labour and delivery time. Giving birth is akin to running a marathon, which requires stamina, determination and focus. Research has also indicated that training for childbirth through exercise may help to ease labour and even shorten the time that it takes to deliver your baby.

5 DECREASE BACK PAIN We all know the body alters a great deal in pregnancy, but one of the less looked for changes are the postural and loading alterations that can lead to lower back pain. Worldwide research has suggested between 30 to 70 percent of pregnant women are affected. To avoid being part of this majority, it is important to strengthen your core muscles and to stay mobile through the pelvic region.

Despite these naturally occurring changes, undertaking physical activity and maintaining a good level of physical fitness and strength is likely to reduce the risk of developing back pain. Moving around, keeping active and doing a resistance-based program, which strengthens the body evenly, will certainly help your core muscles stay strong and this will reduce the chance of developing lower back pain problems.

6 GET YOUR BODY BACK FASTER This alone is motivation enough for many women to embark on a pregnancy exercise regimen. When you have maintained your strength and muscle tone throughout your pregnancy, your body will have an easier time bouncing back after you give birth.

You’ll also gain less surplus weight if you exercise during your pregnancy. Excess weight gain can lead to overstretched skin around the abdominal region, which can be irreversible. This means that even if you manage to lose the weight, you might be stuck with unsightly extra skin that can only be removed surgically. So make the investment before and you will save yourself a larger investment in the future.

These six benefits should give you more than enough reasons to train during a very exciting and special time in your life. Make sure you

seek the advice of a qualified prenatal/postnatal trainer. Alternatively research prenatal training or ask your midwife for some safe and effective exercises, and make sure you give you and your baby the best possible start! ✨

Calum Wilson, owner and head trainer at Limitless Health and Fitness, has specialised in training pre and postnatal clients for over six years. For further information visit limitlesshealth.com.au.

10 TOP TIPS FOR EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY

- 1 Consent from a doctor should be obtained to participate in an exercise program.
- 2 Exercise should not be performed in hot, humid weather. Also steer clear of saunas and steam baths.
- 3 Deep flexion or extension of joints should be avoided because of connective tissue laxity, which is due to the hormone called relaxin.
- 4 For obvious reasons, do not do exercises that may involve loss of balance, especially in the last trimester.
- 5 Keep in mind that on a scale of one to 10, with one feeling like nothing and 10 feeling like you are about to throw up, pregnant women should exercise at five to eight. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) guidelines say, *If you are able to talk normally, your heart rate is at an acceptable level.*
- 6 Warm-up and cool-down periods need to be longer than normal.
- 7 It is a myth that exercise can result in low birth weight. As long as you’re eating a healthy diet, your growing baby will have all the nutrients it needs to flourish. On the other hand, by keeping an expectant mother’s blood sugar in check, exercise reduces her risk of developing gestational diabetes, a condition that often results in oversized babies and surgical deliveries.
- 8 Women who have led sedentary lifestyles should begin with physical activity of a very low intensity and progress to advanced activity levels very gradually.
- 9 Do not stop exercise suddenly or stand in one position for a prolonged period of time. This can result in blood pooling in the legs, low blood pressure and possible fainting.
- 10 Check out the ACOG *Exercise During Pregnancy* guidelines at ecog.org for further exercise tips for pregnancy.