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Do physical exercise during pregnancy increase the risk of miscarriage?

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Background & Aim: Pregnancy is an ideal time for lifestyle modifications, including increasing physical activity and choosing a more healthy diet. We, family doctors, are frequently asked about the effect of regular exercise during pregnancy. Thus, the aim of this review is to understand if there is an association between exercise and pregnancy loss.

Method: We conducted a PubMed search, with the terms “exercise”, “pregnancy” and “pregnancy loss”, for systematic reviews and meta-analysis, published in the last 20 years. We selected 11 articles after reading the papers/abstracts. All the other articles were excluded because the risk of miscarriage with the exercise wasn’t evaluated.

Results: In the absence of medical or obstetrical complications, pregnant women should be encouraged to continue and maintain an active lifestyle during their pregnancies. Different studies found no relationship between exercise and pregnancy loss. Only the exercises with frequent crouching and increased intra-abdominal pressure demonstrated an increased risk of miscarriage. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists recommends: all pregnant women should participate in aerobic and strength-conditioning exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle during their pregnancy. Previously sedentary women, should begin exercise and increase it gradually. Pregnant women who habitually engage in vigorous-intensity aerobic activity can continue this physical activity under medical supervision. Some activities with high risk of trauma should be avoided.

Conclusions: Women with uncomplicated pregnancies should be encouraged to exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy. This period is an opportunity to start and maintain healthy changes in life.

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