

New study finds resistance training in first trimester of pregnancy beneficial to mother and child

Written by Anytime Fitness

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Staying healthy during pregnancy is something most women prioritize, but when it comes to exercise, how much is too much?

In the past, pregnant women have had little accurate information concerning the effects resistance training may have during their pregnancy. However, this month, a first-of-its-kind study found that an exercise routine including resistance training in the first trimester is extremely beneficial to mother and child, and has no correlation to increased risk of complications during pregnancy. In fact it may also help reduce the risk of gestational diabetes and pregnancy induced hypertension.

The new study, conducted by Michigan State University in partnership with Anytime Fitness and AnytimeHealth.com, studied women who had given birth within the last five years. Overall, the study found that the women who performed resistance training during the first trimester were similar, if not better to those who did not, in respect to maternal weight gain, gestational age at delivery, length of infant at birth, and birth weight.

"We know aerobic activity has been shown to improve the health of mother and child during pregnancy and with this new research we can now say that resistance training can be beneficial as well during the first trimester," said Michigan State University Kinesiology Professor, Dr. Jim Pivarnik. "These preliminary results suggest that not only is this type of exercise safe, but the study also found that weight lifting may help reduce the risk of gestational diabetes, pregnancy induced hypertension and weight control, since the women in the study who resistance trained had a lower pre-pregnancy body mass index (BMI)."

Of the 214 women studied, 56 performed resistance training using either free weights or weight machines an average of 2.9 days per week for 30 minutes a session.

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During the first trimester, the F.I.T.T. principle (focus on frequency, intensity, time and exercise type) is the best method for women to exercise safely and effectively. It is also a simple way for expectant mothers to begin to improve their muscular strength and endurance in just four easy steps:

Frequency: 3 days a week

Intensity: Low amount of weights and higher repetitions (around 12 to 15)

Time: 20 to 30 minutes a session

Type: Free weights, weight machines, resistance bands, or kettle bells

"Staying fit and active during pregnancy can have positive effects on mother and child and the F.I.T.T. principle is a great place to start to improve muscular strength and endurance," said Brian Zehetner, director of AnytimeHealth.com, one of the study's co-sponsors. "To get the most benefit from resistance training, it is important to also include aerobic activity in your weekly workout regiment."

Pivarnik and Zehetner recommend the following tips for pregnant women, pre- and post-pregnancy, to stay motivated and to make exercise more enjoyable:

- Start slow and build up to your goal.
- Work out with a friend, or a group of friends (bring your stroller if you need to!).
- Find a group exercise class – many options, such as prenatal yoga, Pilates, or Zumba, will improve both cardio and muscular strength.
- Sneak physical activity into daily life by taking a 10-minute walk at lunch or during breaks.
- Find exercises to do at home with resistance bands, so you can work out while the kids are napping.

"It is important to remember that women should always communicate with their health care provider before initiating an exercise program," Pivarnik said.

The findings of this research are part of an ongoing study by Michigan State University that is available to all women who belong to Anytime Fitness and AnytimeHealth.com.

The Michigan State University study was conducted by Erin E. Kuffel; Karin A. Pfeiffer, FACSM; Claudia B. Holzman; Daniel R. Gould; and James M. Pivarnik, FACSM, in 2011. The women in the study completed online surveys and were recruited by Anytime Fitness and AnytimeHealth.com.