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Exercise Reduces Risk of Preeclampsia

Preeclampsia is one of the most common causes of maternal illness and perinatal death. This life-threatening disease affects 5-10 % of all pregnancies, an estimated 6 million women a year worldwide.

Preeclampsia, usually referred to as "toxemia," is characterized by high blood pressure, protein in the urine after the 20th week of pregnancy and swelling of the face and hands.

Eighty-five percent of all preeclampsia cases occur in the first pregnancy. Other risk factors include:

- Multiple pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Chronic high blood pressure
- Kidney disease
- Rheumatologic disease (i.e. Lupus)
- Family history

Preeclampsia is also more prevalent in pregnant teenagers as well as in

pregnant women over the age of 35.

The exact cause of Preeclampsia is unknown. However, researchers at the Swedish Medical Center in Seattle, Washington found that the risk of Preeclampsia was inversely proportional to the amount of time spent on physical activity.

Investigators evaluated 201 women who had Preeclampsia and delivered between 1998 and 2001. They matched delivery data, age and number of pregnancies to a control group of 386 women. Women were surveyed in the hospital during the postpartum phase about physical activity performed for the year prior to conception and the first 20 weeks of their pregnancies.

Results showed that risk

was reduced by about one-third in women who had

participated in recreational physical activity in early pregnancy and was further

reduced if the activity was also practiced prior to pregnancy.

Researchers found that women who walked at least 3 mph or higher were at lesser risk than slower women walkers. They also found that climbing one to four flights of stairs every day reduced risk.

Interestingly, the number of prior births and body mass index had no effect on risk reduction. Investigators suggest that public health efforts encourage pregnant women to increase physical activity in the hopes of reducing the risk of preeclampsia.

Currently, there is a five-

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year prospective study being conducted at Magee-Women's Research Institute in Pittsburgh, PA. Investigators claim that risk factors for Preeclampsia are looking more and more like those for cardiovascular diseases.

There is also an association between Preeclampsia and insulin resistance related to Type 2 Diabetes. Recent studies have shown that exercise reduces insulin resistance in people with Type 2 Diabetes.

For these reasons, researchers believe that exercise will likely help to reduce the risks of Preeclampsia. More information about Preeclampsia and current research can be found online at:

<http://www.mwri.magee.edu/html>.

Everyday Stretches for Pregnant Women

Stretching during pregnancy helps women:

- Prepare the body for the stress of pregnancy.
- Decrease muscle stiffness and increase range of motion.
- Lower risk of injury.

- Promote circulation.
- Improve posture.
- Decrease the risk of low-back pain.
- Reduce muscular tension.

Here are some easy-to-follow stretches that can be practiced everyday.

Continue to breath easily while holding each stretch. And remember, stretching is dynamic, not static. So, while you are holding the stretch, think about lengthening the muscles being stretched, releasing tension and maintaining proper body alignment.

Torso Stretch: Stand in good posture and bring arms above your head with palms together. Cross your thumbs and pull up from under the armpit. Breathe deeply into the sides of your torso.

As you exhale, lean toward the right side. Breathe into the stretch for a couple of breaths and then, as you inhale, return to center. Repeat to the left side, and return to center. Alternate sides for two more times on each side.

Child's Pose: Sit with knees bent and hips over heels. Separate knees to make room for your baby. Stretch arms in front of you and rest your forehead on the mat. Hold for 3-5 breaths.

Monkey Stretch: Kneel on mat or blanket. Bring right leg forward with ankle slightly in front of your knee. Place hands on top of right thigh and interlace your fingers. Press down with your hands as you lift your torso away from your hips. As you inhale, shift your weight forward and feel a stretch in the left hip flexor muscle in front of the hip. Hold while breathing normally for 3-5 breaths.

Then shift your weight back and repeat. Switch legs and perform the Monkey Stretch on the other side.

Quadriceps Stretch:

Standing in good posture, bend one knee and reach back with hand of same side to grab your ankle or foot. Keep other knee slightly bent for support. Use the wall for balance if you need to.

Gently, pull leg back to stretch the front of your thigh. Hold for 3-5 breaths. Repeat on other side.

This can also be done while lying on your side.

Squats: From a tabletop position, separate your feet more than a hip-width apart, and walk your hands toward your knees while shifting weight towards your heels.

Either keep hands on floor for balance or bring palms together in front of the heart with forearms in front of shins. Hold for 3-5 breaths.

Bound angle: Sit with soles of the feet together. Hold ankles or feet with both hands. Relax shoulders and reach knees toward the floor. Stretch up through the spine with crown reaching toward the ceiling. Lean forward and hold for 3-5 breaths.

Spine Rotation Stretch: Lie on one side with knees bent and top arm extended on hip. Reach into the top arm toward the feet and then slowly rotate the arm forward, up toward the head and eventually to the opposite side at shoulder level following with your head.

Keep reaching into the arm trying to get the shoulder on the floor. Hold stretch for 3-5 breaths and then continue circling your arm eventually bringing it back to hip. Repeat on same side and then repeat twice on other side.

Sitting Hip Stretch: Sit with soles of the feet together and knees at a 90-degree angle. Inhaling, stretch into the spine, reaching the crown of the head toward the ceiling.

Exhaling, release forward keeping the back straight and head in alignment with the spine.

Hold this position for 3-5 breaths and then round your back and release your head toward your feet. Hold this position for 3-5 breaths and then, slowly roll back up to a sitting position with your shoulders and head the last to come up.

For more stretching and strengthening exercises during pregnancy, order *The MOTHERWELL Yoga Video for Expectant Moms* or visit our website at <http://www.motherwellfitness.com>

Pregnancy After 35

Most healthy women in their 30's and 40's have healthy pregnancies. However, good prenatal care and healthy lifestyle choices can help reduce certain risks.

Women over 35 are more at risk for the following:

- Fertility problems
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Multiple pregnancy
- Miscarriage
- Placenta previa
- Cesarean Section
- A baby with a genetic disorder

So, if you're over 35 and trying to get pregnant, what do you do? First of all, see your health care provider to be sure you are in the best health you can be.

If you have any medical problems, be sure to discuss how pregnancy will or will

not affect your situation and whether or not you can continue taking any medications, if applicable.

It is also a good time to discuss genetic risks, if any as well as making healthy nutrition and lifestyle choices.

In the earliest weeks of pregnancy, both alcohol and tobacco can be harmful to the fetus. Think about giving up these habits while you are trying to get pregnant.

Once you get pregnant, be sure to eat healthy foods, gain an appropriate amount of weight and exercise on a regular basis.

Mild to moderate intensity exercise during pregnancy will improve

your health, decrease common discomforts and reduce your risk of complications like Hypertension, Gestational Diabetes and as mentioned earlier in this newsletter, life-threatening diseases like Preeclampsia.

Studies show that when women over 35 make healthy choices during pregnancy, they actually have healthier pregnancy outcomes than younger women. The key is to plan early.

And regardless of what age you are, it is always a good idea to choose healthy lifestyles for you and your family.
