

Is Exercise Effective Prevention for Postpartum Depression?

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Background: Postpartum depression is a prevalent disease that affects many women. Research is lacking on whether physical activity during pregnancy can help prevent postpartum depression.

There are currently no guidelines in place for prevention in women who have no history of psychiatric illness. An evidence-based clinical review was conducted to determine if physical activity during pregnancy can help prevent postpartum depression.

Purpose: This research sought to discover if physical activity is a viable option to help prevent postpartum depression. Physical activity includes aerobic exercise, strength training, yoga, home-based programs, aquatics, and resistance training.

Methods: An evidence-based clinical review of English articles was conducted via PubMed, CINAHL Complete, and Medline Complete. This research includes all studies of “good” quality that researched or tested the effects of starting physical activity before 26 weeks of pregnancy on postpartum depression. All articles that met the criteria were then reviewed by all 3 authors using quality assessments and analyzed using a data extraction tool.

Results: Three studies met all criteria set forth by the researchers which collectively included 102,856 women. The studies measured levels of postpartum depression at 1 or more intervals ranging from 1 week to 52 weeks postpartum. A majority of the included studies showed statistical significance that exercising during pregnancy reduced the incidence of postpartum depression.

Conclusion: Physical activity during pregnancy prior to 26 weeks has been shown to reduce PPD in women without a history of mental illness. Further research is needed to confirm these findings and incorporate them into guidelines for providers.