Exercise and Nutrition Prevent Excessive Weight Gain During Pregnancy

Both practices may also help women lose weight more quickly post-baby and may put infant at lower risk of being overweight or obese later in life

Indianapolis (PRWEB) July 16, 2012 -- Low or moderate exercise and healthy eating habits markedly decrease the likelihood of excessive gestational weight gain, according to research published in the official journal of the American College of Sports Medicine. This study, in the August edition of Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise®, demonstrates that a prenatal Nutrition and Exercise Lifestyle Intervention Program, called the NELIP, was successful in preventing excessive gestational weight gain and reducing postpartum weight retention in women who were of normal weight prior to pregnancy.

The authors randomly assigned 49 pregnant women at 16-20 weeks gestation in two groups. One participated in a low-intensity walking program and the other in a moderate-intensity walking program. Both also followed a meal plan based on nutrition guidelines given to gestational diabetic women set by the researchers. Compared to a group of women who did not participate in any lifestyle intervention during pregnancy (control group), both groups participating in NELIP had lower average gestational weight gain and were less likely to gain excessive weight.

Of the participants, 70% of those participating in low-intensity exercise and 77% of those participating in moderate-intensity exercise did not gain excessive weight, compared to only 47% of women studied participating in no exercise.

Although the prevention of excessive gestational weight gain did not influence infant birth weight (babies born to women in the intervention and control groups had similar birth weight), it may reduce the long-term risk for obesity in the infants. Pregnancy is an important period in determining offspring health later in life (fetal origins of disease) and the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits during pregnancy and the prevention of excessive gestational weight gain may consequently have a positive impact on their long-term health.

“Women benefit greatly from being active throughout their pregnancies and physical activity is strongly recommended by professional organizations. However, most pregnant women remain inactive and this may be contributing to excessive gestational weight gain, which is associated with an increased risk for future obesity in both the mother and offspring,” said lead author Stephanie-May Ruchat, Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Western Ontario. “Myths about nutrition in pregnancy can also be misleading. For example, mothers-to-be should be warned that 'eating for two' does not mean they need to eat twice as much but that they should eat twice as healthy. An increase of only 200 to 500 kilocalories per day in the second and third trimester is recommended, depending on the body mass index of the women prior to pregnancy (the heavier the woman is, the fewer extra calories per day she will need during pregnancy).”

The study also followed up with the participants post-partum. Within two months of delivery, 28 percent of women in the moderate-intensity exercise group were within 2.0 kg (approximately 4.4 lbs) of their prepregnancy weight, compared to only seven percent of the control group, suggesting that NELIP was successful at decreasing weight retention in early postpartum. This study highlighted the importance of being active and eating healthy during pregnancy to prevent excessive gestational weight gain and weight retention. Further, it showed that increasing the intensity of exercise did not influence weight gain, suggesting that participating in a low- or moderate- intensity walking program,
combined with healthy eating habits, is an important component of a healthy pregnancy.

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The American College of Sports Medicine is the largest sports medicine and exercise science organization in the world. More than 45,000 international, national and regional members and certified professionals are dedicated to advancing and integrating scientific research to provide educational and practical applications of exercise science and sports medicine.

Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise® is the official journal of the American College of Sports Medicine, and is available from Lippincott Williams & Wilkins at 1-800-638-6423. For a complete copy of the research paper (Vol. 44, No. 8, pp: 1419-1426) or to speak with a leading sports medicine expert on the topic, contact the Department of Communications and Public Information at 317-637-9200 ext. 133. Visit ACSM online at www.acsm.org.

The conclusions outlined in this news release are those of the researchers only, and should not be construed as an official statement of the American College of Sports Medicine.
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