

Call to Action: Motivating Moms to Move

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Motivating Moms to Move

The findings published by Flegal and colleagues report a linear increasing shift in overweight and obesity among US women (40%) [1]. The recent reported rise in obesity among American women is not only alarming for the many women that will suffer from the adverse health effects brought on by the disease but also for future generations of children that are born to mothers that are overweight or obese [1,2]. This worrying trend is not specific to the United States. According to the WHO, approximately 15% of women worldwide are obese [3] and this translates into more women of childbearing age becoming obese. In England, obesity rates among women have steadily risen affecting approximately half of the population of women of childbearing age [4]. Obesity during pregnancy is related to newborn weight status, which leads to an increased risk of obesity in later years [5]. The adverse health effects from maternal obesity are a serious health concern and a threat to the mother and unborn child.

Despite the known health benefits of physical activity participation, recent evidence indicates a decline in physical activity patterns in women of childbearing age [4]. This is specifically troubling in Asia due to the limited amount of time women spend physically active [6], the reported higher level of abdominal obesity and increased risk for chronic disease [7]. This is further complicated by cultural norms and traditions that prohibit pregnant women from engaging in physically demanding pursuits and the lack of health education that supports physical activity participation [6].

Adherence to physical activity participation during pregnancy decreases gestational weight gain consequently improving the health for both the mother and unborn child [8]. Whilst there are limitations to physical activity participation during pregnancy experts have made great strides to create physical activity guidelines for pregnant women as well as those intending to conceive [8]. These activity recommendations include specifics for mothers with complications. Mothers with health concerns or complications should be referred to a doctor before engaging in any physical activity regime whereas healthy pregnant women are encouraged to participate in 150 minutes a week of moderate to vigorous activity dispersed into intermittent bouts of not less than 10 minutes [9].

Appeals for increasing physical activity participation in pregnant women as well as women of childbearing age are limited due to cultural and traditional beliefs that physical activity would be harmful

to a fetus [10]. These beliefs as well as the lack of education about the benefits of exercise during pregnancy have stifled the move to healthier generations. There is an exceptional need for health care practitioners to recognize the importance of physical activity during pregnancy and promote the practice of habitual physical activity participation. Women play a key role in the health and well-being of future generations and it is the hope that obstetricians, clinicians and health care providers will begin to promote physical activity participation during pregnancy. Nowhere will this be more important than in developing countries, which have witnessed rapid industrialization and unhealthy lifestyle transitions. This call to action is to urge all stakeholders to promote physical activity to pregnant women and women wishing to conceive with a specific focus on women in developing countries that lack health education and support to be physically active.

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