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Weight Training Can Boost The Energy of Fatigued Pregnant Women

Evidence shows that miserable fatigue hammers 60% to 90% of pregnant women who will give birth in a few months, and there seems no remedy in that energy-depleted second trimester.

But future moms may have a simple way to recharge: A new study suggests brief bouts of weight training a couple of times a week can significantly boost their stamina. The study is in the April issue of *Psychosomatic Medicine*, journal of the American Psychosomatic Society.

The researchers focused on second-trimester women with past or current back pain because about half of pregnant women experience low back pain, which tends to increase fatigue. All of them had healthy pregnancies and no mental disorders, says senior author Patrick J. O'Connor, Ph.D., Professor of Kinesiology at University of Georgia. All of the 134 participants filled out questionnaires about their mood, health and energy levels at the outset. Then they were randomly assigned to either a "wait list," an education class about labor and parenting or a 12-week program of twice-weekly exercise sessions.

Each supervised session, lasting about 17 minutes, included an abdominal resistance exercise with no added weight load, plus five exercises such as leg extensions and arm pulls with gradually increasing weights. All of these exercises were low-to-moderate intensity, so there wasn't an undue physical burden, says O'Connor. And previous research had shown that such weight training is safe during a normal pregnancy.

This exercise apparently paid off. Compared to the education and wait groups, two to three times as many women who did weight training said their fatigue had ebbed. O'Connor also compared scores on vitality, which isn't so much about physically dragging but rather about feeling energetic and engaged. On that score, two to four times as many weight-training women said they'd improved, compared to education and wait list participants.

Gynecologists traditionally have steered pregnant women away from weight work, notes O'Connor. "For years they've told women not to lift more than 20 pounds, meanwhile the women had another child who weighed 30 pounds who they lifted regularly," he says. "I'm not saying everyone should run out and do weight training, but this newer research suggests it's a safe and effective option for tired pregnant women who are otherwise healthy." A trainer's supervision, at least to start, and going very slow on weight increases are both recommended cautions.

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