

## Exercise for Stronger Babies

Studies have shown that exercise has a positive effect on mothers-to-be, and no detrimental impact on their developing offspring.

A new study further extends the knowledge of research in this area and has found that not only do women benefit from exercise in pregnancy, but their fetuses do too.

These findings are contained in a new study entitled, Effects of Maternal Exercise on the Fetal Heart. It was conducted by Linda E. May of the Department of Anatomy, Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences (KCUMB), Kansas City, MO. Dr. May says “this is the first research to show that exercise is beneficial to babies as well.”

Dr. May and her colleagues looked at the results from pregnant women between 20 and 35 years of age. The mothers were classified as exercisers if they performed moderate intensity aerobic exercise at least 30 minutes three times per week (moderate to vigorous walking, stationary bicycling and running). Mothers in the control category did not partake of a regular exercise routine. Measurements were taken between 24-36 weeks gestational age.

“Babies in utero don’t breathe all the time. They take ‘practice breaths,’ which help the lungs and nervous system develop,” Dr. May explains. **“The fetuses of the exercising moms had lower heart rates. Their nervous systems were more mature, and their breathing was longer and deeper, improving their overall health.** These findings suggest a potential benefit of maternal exercise on fetal development because of the link between fetal breathing movements and the developing autonomic nervous system.

All women should check with their healthcare provider first, but Dr. May advises: “If you exercised before, keep it up. If you didn’t, talk to your physician, start slowly, but definitely get moving.” Both you and your baby will be stronger for it.

*Source: National Library of Medicine*