

Egyptian Fertility Sterility Society

The 30th Editorial

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Does Light activity during pregnancy improve pregnancy outcomes?

What Is Known Already?

Regular physical activity is one of the most important actions individuals, including pregnant individuals, can take to improve their health [1-5]. Exercise during pregnancy may improve pregnancy outcomes, in addition to its general health benefits, although randomized trials have had methodological limitations [6,7]. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and other international organizations recommend that in the absence of contraindications, pregnant individuals should continue or commence exercising, emphasizing that exercise is an important component of optimal health maintenance [8].

However, a population-based survey in the United States determined that 60 percent of pregnant individuals do not engage in either moderate or vigorous leisure physical activity [9] and, in the past, fewer than 15 percent met the minimum generally accepted recommendation of engaging in 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week [10].

Exercise is generally considered beneficial for pregnant patients, but sedentary patients can find it daunting to change their habits [11]

What Is New?

. In an observational study that used accelerometry to monitor the activity of 470 pregnant patients, individuals with less sedentary time, more light physical activity (including standing), and higher step counts had a reduced risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, including hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (eg, chronic hypertension, gestational hypertension, preeclampsia) [12]. Patients sitting >10 hours a day had twice the risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes compared with those sitting for 7 hours per day. This study provides further data that modest changes in behavior, such as standing and walking more, can have a positive impact on pregnancy outcomes, and supports the framework of "sit less, move more."

Wider implications of the findings:

Among pregnant individuals, sitting less with greater light-intensity movement and steps was associated with significantly lower risks of adverse pregnancy outcomes. Optimizing lighter-intensity activity patterns should be rigorously tested as a strategy to improve pregnancy health.

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