

## Regular Exercise Reduces Pregnancy-Related Diabetes Risk

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Results of a study provide more evidence that engaging in regular physical activity before and during pregnancy reduces a woman's risk developing pregnancy-induced diabetes (a.k.a. gestational diabetes).

A lack of exercise may be one of the few modifiable risk factors for gestational diabetes, which affects upwards of 7 percent of pregnancies and is associated with harmful effects on the fetus and mother-to-be, according to the authors of the study in the medical journal *Epidemiology*.

Babies born to mothers with gestational diabetes may be abnormally large, may suffer from jaundice, low blood sugar and low calcium, and may experience traumatic births, they explain, while women with gestational diabetes are more likely to become diabetic after pregnancy.

For their study, Dr. Carole B. Rudra from the University of Washington and colleagues examined the relation between gestational diabetes and "perceived exertion" in lean and overweight women. They did this, in part, by asking the women how they would rate their level of exertion during usual exercise in the year before becoming pregnant.

The investigators found that the higher the level of perceived exertion, the lower was the risk of pregnancy-related diabetes. Women reporting very strenuous usual exertion were 81 percent less likely to develop gestational diabetes compared with women reporting negligible or minimal exertion. Women reporting moderate usual exertion had a 59 percent risk reduction compared with women reporting negligible or weak exertion.

It's worth noting, the authors say, that the risk reduction was even evident in women who fell short of recommended levels of physical activity in the year before becoming pregnant.

The current study joins several other studies demonstrating the benefits of regular physical activity before and during pregnancy.

SOURCE: *Epidemiology*, January 2006.