

Pelvic Floor Muscle Training During Pregnancy Facilitates Labor

Yael Waknine

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Aug. 13, 2004 — Pelvic floor muscle training during pregnancy is associated with fewer cases of prolonged second-stage labor, according to the results of a randomized controlled trial published in the Aug. 14 issue of the *British Medical Journal*.

"A myth prevails among birth attendants that strong pelvic floor muscles (for example, as a result of horse riding) may obstruct labour," writes Kjell A Salvesen, from Trondheim University Hospital, and Siv Mørkved, from Norwegian University of Science and Technology, both in Trondheim, Norway. "However, training of the pelvic floor muscles may produce strong and well controlled muscles that will facilitate labour."

The effect of pelvic floor muscle training on labor was examined as a secondary outcome measure of a trial showing that pelvic floor muscle training reduces incontinence during and after pregnancy. The trial involved 301 nulliparous women randomly allocated to a structured pelvic floor muscle training program between the 20th and 36th week of pregnancy (n = 148) or to a control group (n = 153).

Results showed that women with pelvic floor muscle training had a lower rate of prolonged second-stage labor (defined as active pushing for longer than 60 minutes) compared with women who did not receive training (24% [95% confidence interval (CI), 16% - 33%] vs. 38% [95% CI, 28% - 47%]). The duration of second-stage labor was similar between the two groups (40 minutes vs. 45 minutes; $P = .06$).

"We found no differences in body mass index or self reported regular physical exercise after the training period," the authors write. "This argues for an effect of increased strength and better control of pelvic floor muscles rather than a general effect of physical training during pregnancy."

The authors conclude, "The effect may be on the central nervous system and the muscles, and training seems to facilitate rather than obstruct labour," adding that new trials of other populations are needed.

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