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An Investigation into the Effects of Light Exercise on
Post-Natal Low Mood

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Abstract

Sustained low mood in the post-natal period can be a problem for a number of new mothers, which is experienced as distressing and can lead to the development of Post-Natal Depression (PND). Interventions need to recognise the challenges of new motherhood, and how these may impact upon a women's ability to seek treatment. The current study draws on previous research suggesting that exercise may be beneficial in improving the mood of new mothers. Whilst this positive effect has previously been demonstrated for women with PND, it has not been investigated for women with post-natal low mood.

The effects of a 12-week pram-walking programme on post-natal low mood were investigated. The impact of self-esteem and exercise-enjoyment on mood outcomes were also explored. Thirteen participants with post-natal low mood were recruited and randomly assigned to a walking intervention group or a stretching comparison group. All participants were under the same conditions in order to isolate the effects of walking.

Main findings suggest that mothers in the 12-week walking programme experienced statistically significant improvements in mood, however this was also the case for participants in the stretching comparison group. A relationship was found between self-esteem and mood throughout the study, but, unexpectedly, exercise enjoyment was not related to mood.

The implications of the findings are based on the potential for exercise to be implemented to address low mood and also act as a potential preventative measure for the development of PND. Further investigation into the role of self-esteem within the exercise-mood relationship, and specific exercise prescription variables that will best serve a post-natal population, is needed.

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