



# SWIM FOR

## The Benefits of

by Meg Zachwieja and Mel Goldstein

Meg Zachwieja is a YMCA Indy SwimFit member and a physical therapist who works with obstetric patients.

Mel Goldstein is director and coach of YMCA Indy SwimFit in Indianapolis, past president of USMS and USMS Coach of the Year in 2001.

**Y**our belly is growing, and your body is tired. Your feet and ankles are swollen and you probably have back problems. The last thing you are thinking about is an exercise regimen, but as YMCA Indy SwimFit (ISF) member Mary Beardon explains, “Swimming has been a great way to exercise through this pregnancy. On the days I swim, I have more energy.”

Masters swimmers across the country are reaping the benefits of swimming as the preferred mode of exercise through pregnancy, and recognizing its importance in the physical recovery following delivery.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) has modernized the guidelines for exercise through uncomplicated pregnancy. The guidelines published in 2002 for low-risk, healthy pregnant individuals are consistent with those of the American College of Sports Medicine: 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise a day should occur on most days of the week.

The childbearing year is often a time in women’s lives when fitness and healthy eating habits are out the window; however, ACOG encourages exercising through uncomplicated pregnancy for the health of the mother and the baby.

Masters swimmers are tak-

Sharon Dominick

# MING TWO... ■■■

## Workouts During (and After) Pregnancy

ing advantage of these guidelines and swimming throughout pregnancy; some have been known to swim on their due dates. During the past 10 years, the YMCA ISF program has provided members an opportunity to exercise and maintain fitness throughout pregnancy and the post-partum recovery period. The level of fitness maintained and the rate of these members' recovery is impressive. We surveyed ISF members who had been pregnant within the past 10 years to learn more about the role of Masters swimming in maintaining a healthy lifestyle through pregnancy and physical recovery after delivery.

In our survey, we asked about fitness exercise during pregnancy, postpartum exercise and how swimmers perceived the role of swimming in their overall fitness program. The results make a strong case that swimming is a means of maintaining a good level of fitness throughout pregnancy.

We gathered information from 16 women who belonged to the YMCA ISF program during

one or more pregnancies. At beginning of pregnancy, all respondents reported that they swam for exercise. Additionally, many participated in forms of exercise other than swimming such as running/jogging, cycling, walking, weight training or aerobics classes. All respondents swam throughout the duration of the pregnancy, and more than one-third of respondents actually swam on the day of the delivery.

Those who walked for exercise were able to maintain walking throughout the nine months; however, other modes of exercise were not as easily tolerated later in the pregnancy. Only two-thirds of the runners, one-half of the cyclists and one-third of those training with weights continued into the third trimester.

Although swimming and walking were modes of exer-

cise tolerated throughout the pregnancy, swimming provided the higher intensity workout, as measured by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion Scale.

As ISF member Gina Naas explains, "Swimming was amazing during pregnancy. I felt great in the water and throughout the day. I could work hard without feeling like there was a risk to myself or the baby. Being able to continue through pregnancy helped me feel good about being active and fit."

Three fourths of survey

respondents swam four or more days per week at a minimum intensity rated as "somewhat hard," based on the CDC measurement. These same respondents reported their walking intensity as "very light to light."

"Swimming helped give me a sense of accomplishment," says Masters swimmer Joyce Davis.

During pregnancy, there are increases in the mother's blood volume, cardiac output (the amount of blood pumped by the heart each minute) and stroke volume (the amount of blood pumped with each heart beat), according to an article appearing in the *American*

...or four, as the case may be.

**CHRISTIE LEU** swam throughout her pregnancy—including delivery day—and delivered triplets 12 hours after the far right photo was taken.



Ohio Masters member Christie Leu swam throughout her pregnancy with triplets last year, delivering three healthy babies only one month before the due date.

**"Before the triplets were born, I was swimming five to six workouts a week.**

**It is very unusual that women with triplets suffer no bed rest, but my doctor and I believe that the swimming allowed me to stay active throughout," says Leu.**



YMCA ISF entered its first ever "Preggers Relay," a 200 medley, at the 2005 Indiana State Masters Meet. Representing ISF were (left to right) **GENA ANTONOPOULOS** (five months pregnant), breaststroke; **MICHELLE CHILDRESS-NICKUM** (four months pregnant), backstroke; **ALLIE O'DONNELL** (four to five months pregnant), freestyle; and **KRIS HOUCHENS** (about six months pregnant), butterfly. The relay team swam in Lane 1, allowing members to wait on the other side of the lane line and avoid diving off the blocks. It was the first Masters meet for both Antonopoulos and O'Donnell.

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The benefits of swimming regularly during pregnancy carry on beyond labor and delivery. Coupling the cardiovascular changes during pregnancy with a swimming regimen, Masters swimmers are primed for quick return to a healthy lifestyle after their children are born.

Although there is little research on the post-partum benefits of swimming as the mode of exercise throughout

*Journal of Cardiology* in 1997. These changes are similar to those seen in endurance-trained athletes, the journal reports.

Expectant mothers may be surprised to learn that they are experiencing a training benefit simply by being pregnant. In fact, ISF member Andrea Parenteau, feeling fit and strong during her first pregnancy, competed in the 2000 USMS Short Course Nationals,

participating in the 50 and 100 breaststroke and also relays.

Ohio Masters member Christie Leu swam throughout her pregnancy with triplets last year, delivering three healthy babies only one month before the due date. "Before the triplets were born, I was swimming five to six workouts a week. It is very unusual that women with triplets suffer no bed rest, but my doctor and I

## Exerting Effort

Most YMCA Indy SwimFit survey respondents reported their intensity level while swimming as between 11 to 17 on the Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion chart (below). Besides swimming, respondents also walked throughout pregnancy. However, most respondents rated walking intensity at 9 to 11. Swimming allowed respondents to maintain a high level of fitness throughout their pregnancy and facilitated a quick return to fitness after delivery.

- 06** No exertion at all
- 07** Extremely light exertion
- 08**
- 09** Very light exertion
- 10**
- 11** Light
- 12**
- 13** Somewhat hard (still feels OK to continue)
- 14**
- 15** Hard (heavy exertion)
- 16**
- 17** Very hard (can go on, but have to really push oneself to continue; very tired)
- 18**
- 19** Extremely hard (for most people, the most strenuous exercise ever experienced)
- 20** Maximal exertion

pregnancy, ISF survey respondents indicate positive results, similar to those achieved by participating in land exercise programs. Recent research indicates that healthy women having uncomplicated pregnancies

About a year later, moms posed for this shot with their babies. Pictured in the front row, left to right, are: **ALEXANDER ANTONOPOULOS**, **CAROLINE O'DONNELL**, **PIERCE NICKUM** and **ANTHONY HOUCHENS**.





Peter Bick

Longtime YMCA Indy SwimFit coach **MEL GOLDSTEIN** taught his first water exercise class for pregnant women some 50 years ago when he was 17. “They used to make me go in the locker room until they got in the water, as they did not want me to see them in their swimsuits. So, today, to see these remarkable women—there have been 33 babies born into our program—shows we’ve come a long way.”

may train on land during pregnancy to maintain initial, pre-pregnancy training levels, according to K.R. Kardel, writing in the April 2005 issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports*. This research also indicates that vigorous land exercise throughout an uncomplicated pregnancy facilitates a rapid return to competitive athletics and a physically active lifestyle.

The majority of ISF survey respondents returned to their pre-pregnancy exercise regimen within one week to six months after giving birth. Most also reported a return to pre-pregnancy weight within three weeks to six months. “I believe swimming helped with ease of delivery, and post-pregnancy recovery was very quick,” says Amy Dawkins.

Others report that swimming after the delivery was a means to return to regular social interaction and resumption of a healthy lifestyle. As Allie O’Donnell explains, “After the baby, you feel like you’ve been hit by a truck. It just feels so great to get back in the water.”

For Kris Houchens, YMCA ISF coach, swimming after delivery offered some time for herself. “With two kids under two, it’s hard to find time to shower. Swimming helps get the stink off,” she jokes.

For others, the resumption of exercise after delivery meant a return to competitive athletic endeavors. Triathlete Amanda Holzhausen maintained her fitness program, including Masters swimming, for the duration of her pregnancies. She not only returned quickly and easily to competitive athletics after each pregnancy but also achieved some personal best results. “Just three weeks after I had my son, I participated in the 2004 One Hour Swim. I swam 200 yards more than I ever did before, or since. Maybe my pain tolerance wasn’t back to

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normal yet, but it was a great swim! Also, five months after that hour swim, I had my best time ever in a half Ironman by three minutes,” Holzhausen recounts.

Masters swimming provides benefits throughout the entire

lifespan. It’s been inspiring to swim with and coach the pregnant women in the YMCA ISF program. Their fitness during pregnancy and quick return to fitness after delivery is a motivation for all of us to get out there and swim. <<<

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### Tips for the Active Pregnant Woman

- Discuss your exercise program with your doctor.
- Discuss your changing nutritional needs with a registered dietician or your doctor.
- Tell your coach or workout partner you are pregnant.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your workouts.
- Maintain your pre-pregnancy strength training.
- Monitor your intensity level by the Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion.