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Effects of Exercise Interventions on Fatigue-Related Myalgia Associated with Postpartum Depression: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Postpartum Depression (PPD) often occurs within the first year after childbirth and is commonly accompanied by fatigue and muscle pain (fatigue-related myalgia). These symptoms can negatively impact a mother's emotional well-being and ability to care for her baby. While medication is available, many women prefer non-drug treatments such as exercise. This review explores how structured physical activity may help reduce postpartum fatigue and depressive symptoms.

The impact of exercise on postpartum women's depression and fatigue is examined in this narrative review. Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs), systematic reviews, and meta-analyses were the main topics of the studies that were gathered from PubMed, ScienceDirect, the Cochrane Library, and Web of Science. Included studies tested structured exercise programmes such as aerobic training, yoga, aquatic therapy, relaxation techniques, or a combination of these, and specifically looked at postpartum women. They also used validated tools to measure fatigue, myalgia, or depressive symptoms. The studies with unclear results or unstructured activities were excluded. The review compares the types, frequency, and duration of exercise to determine what works and where there is still a lack of evidence.

The findings show that moderate-intensity exercises—such as Pilates, walking, aerobic workouts, and aquatic routines—consistently improved fatigue, depressive symptoms, sleep quality, and functional ability in postpartum women. The most effective programmes were those that lasted 6-12 weeks and were supervised or performed in group settings. Home-based or low-intensity routines were generally less effective.

Supervised and group-based exercise interventions provided both physical and psychological benefits, helping to reduce symptoms of fatigue and depression. Key factors influencing success included exercise type, intensity, duration, and consistency. Long-term participation and support were also crucial in maintaining results, and group settings offered added emotional and social benefits.

Structured, moderate-intensity exercise is a safe and effective strategy to manage postpartum fatigue and depression. It should be included as part of routine postnatal care. Future research should focus on identifying the most effective exercise formats and ways to encourage ongoing participation, particularly among women at high risk for postpartum mental health issues.

Keywords: Aerobic exercise, Anxiety, Aquatic exercise, Depression, Pilates, Postpartum fatigue, Quality of life, Sleep quality, Structured exercise, Walking

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