

Policy on playing hockey when pregnant



There is good evidence about the health benefits of aerobic exercise in pregnancy (1).

However, playing hockey when pregnant beyond 12 weeks may cause harm to the fetus due to the increased risk of blunt trauma to the uterus from contact by another player, ball or stick. (This also applies to Hockey Umpires).

Up until 12-14 weeks gestation, the uterus is protected by the bony pelvis. Beyond this date, the uterus expands beyond the pelvis into the abdomen and is thus exposed to blunt trauma. Therefore, there is a small, but significant, risk of harm to the fetus (and mother) from either a fall or being struck by a blunt force.

Therefore, England Hockey advises that all hockey players, coaches, umpires and physios are advised to consult with their GP as soon as pregnancy is confirmed to ensure that they are fit to play up to 12 week and that no player, coach, umpire or physio should participate in Hockey beyond 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Elite athletes who continue to train during pregnancy require supervision by an obstetric care provider with the knowledge of the impact of strenuous exercise on maternal and fetal outcomes. All pregnant athletes must be made aware of proper hydration, the additional nutritional requirements of pregnancy and exercise and the dangers of heat stress. Routine obstetric evaluation must be strongly recommended. Additional evaluation to assess fetal growth and wellbeing may be appropriate if clinically indicated. The care provider should liaise with the medical officer of the athlete's governing body throughout pregnancy and postpartum. Competing athletes should be advised to abide by the rules of the governing body overseeing the event. Although risks are minimal with moderation, even healthy active women should be examined periodically to assess the effect of their exercise programmes on the developing fetus and their regimen should be adjusted and discontinued if necessary.

Competitive athletes can expect to experience a reduction in their performance during pregnancy.(2)

References

1. Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. Setting standards to improve women's health. Statement No.4. Jan 2006
2. Hale RW, Milne L. The elite athlete and exercise in pregnancy. Semin Perinatol 1996;20(4):277-84.