



# HOW SHOULD HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS TALK TO PREGNANT WOMEN ABOUT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

Williamson et al, 2025



This scoping review examined 21 UK studies exploring physical activity (PA) communication between healthcare professionals (HCPs) and pregnant women. It reveals critical gaps in how PA advice is delivered during pregnancy and provides evidence-based recommendations to improve practice.



## 1 HCPs face major barriers

Healthcare professionals lack **knowledge**, **confidence**, and **time** to provide PA advice. Weight stigma prevents conversations, and many **don't see PA guidance as part of their role**.

## 2 Pregnant women believe PA is dangerous

Many women perceive **unnecessary risk** in activities they did before pregnancy. This perception is reinforced by social pressure from family, friends, and colleagues, leading women to avoid PA.



## 3 Current advice is often inadequate

Many women **do not receive any PA advice** from HCPs during pregnancy. When given, it's described as minimal, **contradictory**, confusing, inconsistent, and **restriction focused** (telling women what not to do, without guidance on what they could do).



## 4 Women want clear, supportive guidance

Pregnant women desire specific advice on safe activities, **practical information**, pregnancy-specific benefits, and **non-judgmental delivery**. Being "told off" leaves them feeling unsupported rather than empowered.



## 5 Low awareness of guidelines and benefits

Many women are **unaware of the PA guidelines**, and have limited knowledge of the various benefits PA can bring. However, where women were aware of the benefits, these related predominantly to **mental and social health** (feeling relaxed and socialising).



## 6 The solution: consistent, benefit-focused messages

HCPs must address safety concerns with specific examples (walking, swimming, yoga), **emphasize mental and social health benefits**, provide clear guidance, use supportive language, and deliver consistent messages across all touchpoints. **Training and dedicated appointment time are essential**.



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