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RE: Comments on the Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report

The 3 million volunteers and 1,500 staff members of the March of Dimes Foundation appreciate the opportunity to submit comments related to the preparation of the first edition of *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*. The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency founded in 1938 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to prevent polio. Today, the Foundation works to improve the health of mothers, infants and children by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality through research, community services, education, and advocacy. The March of Dimes is a unique partnership of scientists, clinicians, parents, members of the business community, and other volunteers affiliated with 51 chapters in every state and Puerto Rico.

The Foundation's comments focus on physical activity during pregnancy. For the pregnant woman, exercise can ease many common discomforts of pregnancy such as constipation, backache, fatigue, sleep disturbances and varicose veins. Regular exercise may also help prevent pregnancy-related forms of diabetes and high blood pressure. Fit women may be able to cope better with labor and have a faster recovery after delivery.

Our primary recommendation is that the Guidelines be based on the best available science and the current *American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Committee Opinion 267*. Pregnant women should be advised to have a prenatal medical evaluation and develop a physical activity program with their health care provider. The guidelines should also indicate that pregnant women should be informed that certain forms of physical activity are discouraged such as scuba diving, downhill skiing, and contact sports and that exercises requiring individuals to lie flat on their back after the first trimester be avoided. Additionally, the guidelines should specify that a pregnant woman contact her health care provider immediately if she experiences vaginal bleeding or fluid leakage, shortness of breath prior to exertion, dizziness, headaches, chest pain, muscle weakness, calf pain or swelling, decreased fetal movement or contractions during physical activity.

The March of Dimes supports the Advisory Committee Report's call for additional prospective randomized studies on physical activity during pregnancy. The United States Surgeon General recently convened a conference of the leading health care experts from across the country and consistent with the Advisory Committee's report, conference participants identified maternal physical activity as an area where additional research is needed.



The Surgeon General's conference and the 2006 Institute of Medicine Report on Preterm Birth both acknowledged the importance of considering the lifecourse perspective that outlines how maternal health influences fetal and infant health outcomes and can ultimately affect susceptibility to obesity and chronic disease conditions in adulthood. The opportunity to improve maternal, fetal, and infant health outcomes will provide enormous public health benefits and support a strong rationale to emphasize physical activity as an important priority for women of childbearing age and during uncomplicated pregnancies. Recommendations for physical activity need to be communicated through clear, evidence-based health messages, particularly for pregnant women, which supports the necessity for further research in order to provide accurate information.

The March of Dimes applauds the work done by the Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee appreciates the opportunity to submit recommendations on the first edition of *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*. We hope you will embrace our recommendations to improve the health of pregnant women.