



## Pregnancy Guidelines

Netball New Zealand considers that Pregnancy is a state of health, not an illness. To continue exercising while pregnant is primarily the player's decision (and they are encouraged to take medical advice in relation to this), so it is important that all players are fully informed of the risks.

Netball is classified as a limited contact sport and therefore there is the potential for a player to fall or collide with either a solid object (i.e. goal post, another player) or a projectile (i.e. the ball). Pregnant players need to be aware that participation in contact or collision sports carries some risks for herself and her unborn child.

The following guidelines outline the responsibilities of the pregnant player, coaches, administrators, umpires and other players when dealing with pregnancy in netball. However as each person and each pregnancy is different, every decision relating to a pregnant player's ongoing participation in netball should be made on an individual basis and these guidelines can only assist all those concerned with pregnancy in netball to make decisions.

The key principle to note is that a pregnant player has the right to participate in her chosen sport and it may be considered discriminatory and prohibited by the Human Rights Act 1993 to use pregnancy as a basis for discrimination.

### **Responsibilities of the Pregnant Player:**

- Obtain professional medical advice and a clear understanding of the risks before making a decision on whether to continue to participate in netball and for how long.
- Regularly review training and playing programme with medical advisor, taking into account the changes to their physical condition.
- Use common sense and avoid taking unnecessary risks.
- Bleeding and/or abdominal pain are warning signs, if either or both occur, stop activity and seek immediate medical advice.
- Pregnant players should avoid overheating, especially in the first trimester.
- Pregnant players **should not** increase the intensity of their training or playing programme at any stage during their pregnancy.
- Pregnant players should monitor their heart rate regularly to ensure they are working at less than 75% of their maximum heart rate.
- The pregnant player should advise her coach and trainer of her pregnancy as soon as possible so that training can be modified accordingly.
- Pregnant players need to also pay special attention to a thorough warm up and cool down, consuming adequate fluids before, during and after exercise.
- Overall, pregnancy will ultimately have an adverse affect on performance and this will be even more noticeable as pregnancy progresses. Pregnancy-related changes such as change in centre of gravity, weight gain and increased laxity of joints and ligaments will ultimately prevent the player from attaining the same level of performance as before she got pregnant.

- The ability to stop and start, or to change direction, which is important in netball, will progressively decrease as the pregnancy progresses. It is important that the player appreciates this natural progression and that there may become a point where the coach will determine that her overall performance (not her pregnancy) is the limiting factor to her on-going playing involvement in the team.
- Musculo-skeletal health is important in pregnancy. As joints and ligaments become more lax as the pregnancy continues the musculo-skeletal system is susceptible to injury. If the pregnant player is experiencing musculo-skeletal pain associated with playing netball she must obtain medical advice and have a clear understanding of potential risks before making a decision on whether to continue to participate in netball and for how long.
- Remember that it is the pregnant player who, in consultation with medical expertise, is best placed to make the decision as to whether to continue to safely participate in netball or when to stop.

### **Responsibilities of the Coach and/or Trainer**

- Respect and support the rights of players who wish to continue exercising while pregnant.
- Encourage and support players to obtain and act on professional medical advice with regard to their continued safe participation in netball and when to stop.
- Confidentiality of a player's pregnancy must be respected, unless the player agrees to disclosure, or it is believed that there is a serious or imminent threat to the player's life or health.
- Avoid giving advice that they are not qualified to give. Coaches & Trainers must be careful when giving advice on how to train during pregnancy that they are not placing themselves in the position of medical experts. A consultative approach between the player, coach, trainer and medical expert is recommended.
- Select players as per the relevant selection policy and ensure that this is based on merit and capability, without discriminating on the basis of pregnancy.
- Remember that it is the pregnant player, in consultation with medical expertise, who shall make the decision as to whether to safely participate in netball and when to stop

### **Responsibilities of the Administrator or Facility Manager**

- Respect and support the rights of women who wish to continue exercising while pregnant.
- Ensure that policies are in place to outline the organisation's commitment to equal opportunity and avoiding discrimination, particularly where pregnant women are concerned.
- Confidentiality of a player's pregnancy must be respected, unless the player agrees to disclosure, or it is believed that there is a serious or imminent threat to the player's life or health.
- Ensure that everyone in the organisation understands these policies and that the policies are reviewed and updated regularly.
- Evaluate and consider precautions that can be taken to avoid harm to all players, including pregnant players.
- Seek professional medical and legal advice when necessary and ensure that this advice is available to coaches, umpires and players when required.
- Ensure Coaches understand that they must select players as per the relevant selection policy and ensure that this is based on merit and capability without discriminating on the basis of pregnancy.
- Promote adherence to the rules of the game.

- Avoid giving advice that they are not qualified to give and encourage pregnant players to obtain and act on medical advice, particularly regarding the risks of continuing to play and when to stop.
- It is recommended that a clear statement containing this advice be prominently displayed and included on relevant documents such as the registration form for competitions.

### **Responsibilities of Umpires and Officials**

- Respect and support the rights of women who wish to continue exercising while pregnant.
- Avoid giving advice that they are not qualified to give.
- Apply the rules of netball equally and fairly to all participants at all times.
- Prioritise the safety and welfare of all participants

### **Responsibilities of the Other Players**

- Respect and support a pregnant player in the same way as they would any other participant.
- Confidentiality of a player's pregnancy must be respected, unless the player agrees to disclosure, or it is believed there is a serious or imminent threat to the player's life or health.
- Adhere to the rules of the game.

### **Other:**

- Legal issues to be considered in dealing with pregnant players include; providing safe playing environments and the privacy of the pregnant player. It is recommended that legal and/or medical advice is sought if an issue arises where it is not clear what steps should be taken in a given situation.

### **Review and Approval of Pregnancy Guidelines**

The Pregnancy Guidelines will be reviewed annually against related medical & legislative changes.

### **Resources:**

The following resources are also recommended if further reading on the subject is sought:

*Pregnancy in Sport: Guidelines for the Australian Sporting Industry* (2002), Australian Sports Commission

*Pregnant Athletes: A review of the legal issues (Australia)* (2001) – an opinion obtained by the Australia and New Zealand Sports Law Association

*Women in Sport: Exercise and Pregnancy*, issued by Sports Medicine New Zealand

*Mums the Word; Exercise During Pregnancy*, New South Wales Sport and Recreation

*Sports Medicine Australia's Statement – the Benefits and Risks of Exercise in Pregnancy*” *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* 5(1):p11-19

*Sports Medicine Australia: Exercise in Pregnancy – Fact Sheet No.2*

*Get Knocked Up or Get Knocked Out –Pregnancy in Sport*, *The Independent* 2 April 2003, A Scott-Howman, Bell Gully

*What Athletes Can Expect When they're Expecting*, (2006) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol 52, Issue 38