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Georgia Southern University Researchers to Study Role of Prenatal Exercise and Nutrition in Childhood Obesity

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Georgia Southern University researchers are looking for ways to prevent and reduce childhood obesity by connecting pregnant women with an online health education course. The research is geared towards promoting preventative measures in the earliest stages of prenatal development by offering the course and promoting physical activity among pregnant women.

Researchers from Georgia Southern's College of Health and Human Sciences have been awarded \$24,844 by the University System of Georgia to study women in their first trimester of pregnancy. They have teamed up with faculty colleagues from the University of Georgia, the Medical College of Georgia and East Georgia Regional Medical Center for the study.

"The state of Georgia ranks the third highest in the nation for childhood obesity with one in three children who are overweight or obese," said Bridget Melton, Ed.D., coordinator of the study and director of the University's Physical Activity Healthful Living Program, "and this study will help people understand the risks of childhood obesity."

Melton says nationwide studies have revealed a critical link between childhood obesity and a mother's health behavior and weight gain during pregnancy.

"Some women feel that it is unsafe to start an exercise routine or maintain one during pregnancy, and we are going to dispel the myths of unsafe exercise," said Melton. "Hopefully, if women understand the benefits and the safety concerns of exercise during pregnancy they will be more likely to continue being physically active throughout their pregnancy," she said.

Women will receive a nutrition education packet and personal pedometer. The women will be given a pre and post 30 minute survey and their physical activity patterns will be analyzed during each trimester. The women will also take part in an online course that will explore the benefits and precautions of exercise during pregnancy. The course will include information about the importance of physical activity, safe exercise programs, nutrition, improving pregnancy outcomes and childhood obesity. Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to join online discussions, complete quizzes and question/answer sessions for reinforcement and feedback. "The discussions and blogs offer a great platform for social networking with peers and the women will develop a strong bond online," said Melton. Upon successful completion of the study, all participants will receive a total of \$50 in gift cards from Wal-Mart.

Recruitment for the 50 participants is now underway for the year-long study. Those who would like to participate must be Bulloch County area residents who are at least 18 years old and in their first trimester of pregnancy. For more information, or to participate in the study, call 912-478-1976 or e-mail jn00964@georgiasouthern.edu.