

University of Victoria researchers are aiming to find out how much the arrival of a baby curtails the health and eating regime of couples

# Pregnant fitness pause

BY KATHERINE DEDYNA  
Times Colonist staff

When baby arrives, many couples wave goodbye to their pre-parenthood weight, eating habits and exercise regimes — or at least that's what University of Victoria exercise psychologist Ryan Rhodes and fellow researchers suspect.

"Some people will bounce back; some people probably won't change their health behaviours at all," says Rhodes. But previous research suggests that parenthood is a major life change that has negative fallout for good health habits due to time constraints and round-the-clock new demands.

Whether or not that is borne out is one aim of the new \$190,000 study comparing new parents and non-parents. Sponsored by the Canadian Diabetes Association, it's touted as one of the most comprehensive ever undertaken with a view to promoting parental health.

Despite their expertise, Rhodes and other investigators found themselves going to "great lengths" to keep their own routines on track when their bundles of joy took over leisure and sleep time.

That, too, got them interested in more research.

"We're one of the first studies to look at fathers," says Rhodes, 34, who has kids aged one and three.

As well, "almost nothing" is known about the nutritional behaviours of parents, he adds, noting that previous research suggests parents eat the equivalent of an entire pizza more per week than non-parents of the same age.

Nor have previous studies measured physical fitness objectively and combined it with food intake and activity.

New parents will be compared to a control group of similar couples without kids.

Jenn and Brad Vidal are one of about 35 couples who have responded to the research call. Jenn, 30, is seven months pregnant. They're an active, but not super-fit, couple, who think it's an interesting topic. Plus, they want to see how their parenthood performance stacks up with professional assessment.

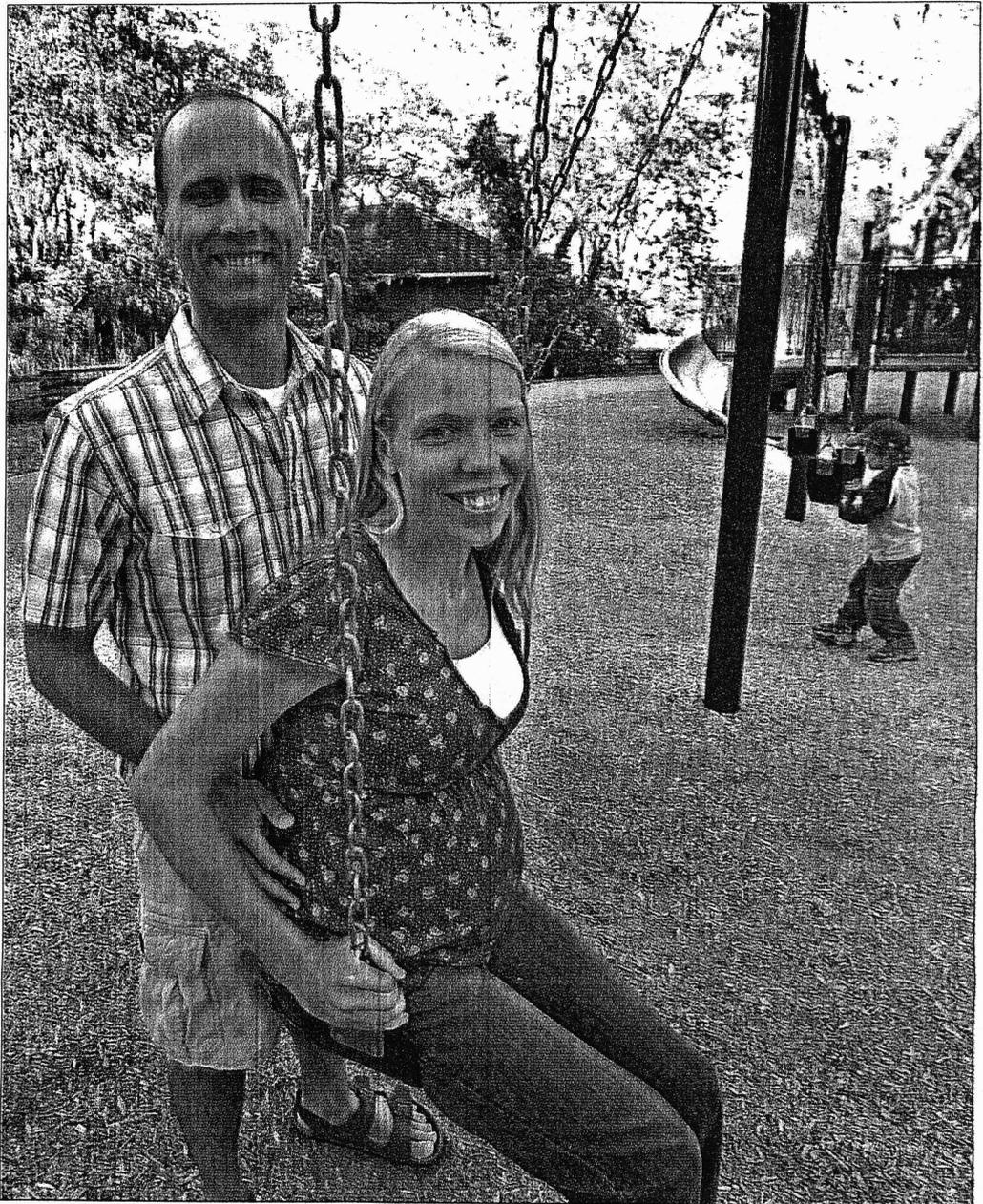
So far, she has managed to resist the pickles and ice cream and kept her diet to the norm. She has found using an accelerometer to measure movement through a microchip a "funny" experience that allows no peeking.

The UVic Behavioural Medicine Lab is looking for 100 more couples — both those already expecting and those not considering their first child for the next two years.

"We're hoping to get all different levels of fitness and different types of nutritional attitudes," says project co-ordinator Kai Riecken. "We do a baseline measurement, and every six months do a followup."

By documenting the habits of couples who keep their healthy behaviours versus those who slide, the study should shed light on the personal attitudes, values, social supports and barriers such as available childcare that come into play, she adds.

Home and neighbourhood issues that will be evaluated include proximity to fast food restaurants, recreation centres, walk-



Jenn and Paul Vidal are expecting their first child and have joined about 35 couples who have responded to the call for participants in a study of parenthood and health habits.  
Darren Stone/Times Colonist

## WANT TO BE A GUINEA PIG?

Are you pregnant? Or not planning to get pregnant for the next two years?

The University of Victoria Behavioural Medicine Laboratory is looking for couples for its groundbreaking study of how new parenthood affects diet and exercise habits. Couples of all backgrounds, incomes and physiques are sought during the next 17 months.

Participants should be aged 20 to 45 without pregnancy problems.

Those accepted will be paid \$175 if they stay the two-year course, will receive travel reimbursement and will get gift cer-

tificates as well as professional assessment of their results upon completion.

At each six-month interval, participants will wear accelerometers on their belts to track steps, up and down movement, and pivoting for seven days. As well, they'll be asked to complete several food diaries.

Men will receive a professional fitness test, including body composition, aerobic fitness, flexibility, strength and vertical jump capacity. Such tests are not suitable for pregnant women.

For more information, call Kai Riecken at 472-5488 or e-mail [kai@uvic.ca](mailto:kai@uvic.ca)

ing paths and heavily trafficked streets.

Activities of daily living such as carrying around the child do increase with parenthood, but they're generally not vigorous enough to top previous exercise

regimes, Rhodes surmises.

Moreover, the major time crunch can mean less meal planning and more exhaustion, which can lead to comfort feedings for parents. A few years of being

a parent could instil less healthy habits that hang on even when more free time opens up.

With so much focus on the health of their children, parents can neglect themselves and they have been neglected in past research, says Rhodes.

The study will include a nutritionist, a sociologist looking at gender differences and an exercise physiologist to look at fitness changes, including professors as far away as Penn State and Dalhousie University.

Rhodes used to go for a run whenever he wanted.

Now he combines fitness and fatherhood when his free time kicks in at 9:30 p.m.

Rhodes clambers onto aerobic and strength-training equipment, listening to the monitors from the kids' room and running up and down to make sure they're OK.