

EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY

If you have not participated in an exercise program does this mean you shouldn't? Of course not -- having a baby will be the most athletic event of your life. This, however, is not the time to begin training for a marathon. Greater caution should be taken and activities should consist of more low impact events such as walking, low impact aerobics, water aerobics, or a specially designed prenatal aerobics class.

Kegel Exercises

One exercise that shouldn't be overlooked both during and after pregnancy is the Kegel exercise. To keep the pelvic floor (also called the Kegel muscles) muscles strong, you need to exercise them. These muscles are attached to the pelvic bone and act like a hammock, holding in your pelvic organs. You can find your pelvic floor muscles by stopping and starting the flow of urine when you urinate. The squeezing that stops the flow of urine are the pelvic floor muscles contracting. Now try contracting and relaxing your Kegel muscles while sitting at your desk, driving in your car and watching television! Aim for a goal of 100 Kegels each day. You can continue exercising your Kegel muscles on a daily basis throughout your pregnancy and can resume them after the birth of your baby. Maintaining a strong pelvic floor will help you regain abdominal strength and tone, vaginal tone and bladder control. The exercises will also help your uterus contract back down to normal size after the birth. This is an exercise you should continue for the rest of your life. Start the habit now and soon it will be second nature.

Doing It Right: Prenatal Exercise Tips

Research has found that participating in moderate exercise during your pregnancy may encourage a shorter labor and a healthier you.

The Advantages of Exercise

Even when you're not pregnant, the emotional advantages of regular exercise are great. Increasing your heart rate for at least 20 minutes 3 times a week reduces stress and anxiety as well as promotes a general feeling of well-being. This could help with the mood changes of pregnancy! In addition, keeping muscles stretched and flexible and joints loose during pregnancy also makes movement easier as your belly grows and your body's center of balance shifts.

Prenatal Exercise's physical advantages are more expansive, since they cover your and your baby general health as well as strengthening your body for labor. Women who maintain a moderate exercise routine during pregnancy are better prepared for birthing (they don't call it "labor" for nothing!), and have better chance at having a shorter, easier labor.

Don't Overdo It

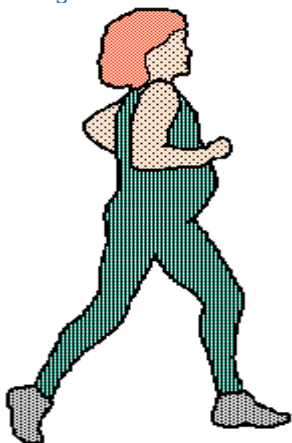
Whether or not you exercised regularly before you were pregnant, making fitness goals during this time might cause harm to you or the baby. Exercise should not be extreme - you should never feel winded, dehydrated, or exhausted during or after a workout. Warning signs to look out for while exercising include: localized pain, chronic fatigue, spotting or bleeding, or decrease in fetal movement after workout. If you have any of these symptoms during or after exercise, call us immediately.

Don't let yourself get dehydrated. Pregnant women who are maintaining an exercise regimen should be drinking about 3 liters of water a day. In exceedingly hot and humid weather more liquid may be required and exercise should be less strenuous. Exercise that requires bouncing around is also discouraged - like high-impact aerobics and mountain biking, which may cause harm to your developing fetus.

Which exercises are best?

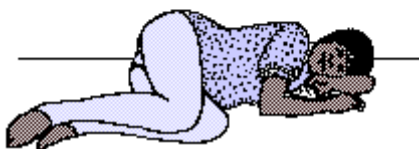
Cardiovascular/Low Impact Aerobic Activity

Exercises under this category include swimming, water aerobics, and brisk walking. Swimming and water aerobics are a great workout for your cardio system, and water is easy on your joints and muscles. Same for water aerobics, where you can move freely while your heart rate increases. Brisk walking - the kind that you can do while maintaining a conversation - not only gets your heart going, but also strengthens the muscles that you will use in labor.



You may exercise on your own or have fun and join our classes.

Flexibility Exercises Joining a prenatal yoga class is a great way to stretch muscles that will be used in labor. Gentle stretches provide you with more flexibility in the muscle and joints, which will allow you an easier labor.



Muscle Strengthening

The stronger your back, legs, and abdomen at the time of labor, the easier all that pushing will be. Through exercise techniques like yoga or a prenatal aerobics class, you can find exercises that will isolate these muscle groups for increased strength and endurance

Activities that can be started during pregnancy, even by those not currently participating in an exercise program are:

- **low impact aerobics**
 - * **stationary biking**
 - * **rowing machine**
 - * **Stairmaster/stair climbing**
 - * **swimming**
 - * **walking**
 - * **water aerobics**
 - * **light weight training**

STOP exercising and consult your physician if you experience any of the following symptoms during exercise:

*bleeding

* cramping

*faintness

*elevated blood pressure

*dizziness

*severe joint pain

You should NOT exercise to exhaustion--stop when you are fatigued.

Exercise regularly and consistently. You should exercise at least three times per week. If you exercise more frequently, alternate hard and easy workouts

During pregnancy, all the connective tissue in the body becomes more lax than normal. To help prevent injury, avoid deep flexion and extension of the joints and avoid activities that require jumping or jarring motions or rapid changes in direction. If an activity becomes uncomfortable due to joint instability, modify or discontinue the activity.

Drink plenty of fluids, especially water, before and after exercise to avoid dehydration. If your exercise session is longer than 15 minutes, interrupt your workout to drink additional liquids. Drink even if you are not thirsty, as thirst lags behind the body's need for fluids.

Rise gradually from the floor to avoid a sudden, rapid decrease in blood pressure which may result in a momentary blackout. Continue walking after rising to assist return blood flow to the heart.

Exercise at a comfortable intensity, and be prepared to modify exercise intensity as your pregnancy progresses.

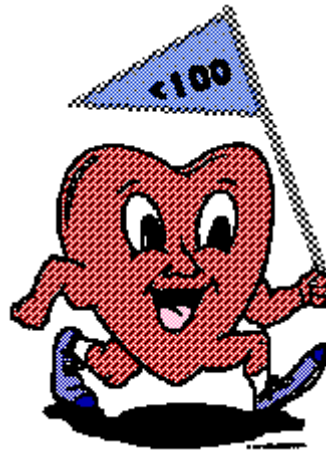
You can gauge exercise intensity by using the talk test--you should be able to talk while exercising.



You should be able to Talk while you exercise

Consult your doctor or one of our qualified exercise instructors to determine your specific target heart rate.

Follow your exercise session with a 5-15 minute cool-down consisting of slow biking or walking.



Cool down until your heart rate is less than 100 beats per minute (16 beats in 10 seconds).

Your ability to exercise may decrease during the first three months of pregnancy as well as the last few weeks before delivery. You can continue to exercise until delivery barring medical problems.

Make sure you wear loose, light clothing (to deflect the sun), and well-supported and cushioned shoes (preferably running shoes).

You may exercise on your own, or have fun and join our classes



The following activities should be avoided during pregnancy due to increased risk to the mother and/or baby.

***competitive sports**

***hang gliding**

***horseback riding**

***inversion**

***scuba diving**

***sky diving**

***snow skiing**

***springboard diving**

***water skiing**

POST PREGNANCY EXERCISE

Post pregnancy is just like when you start exercising when you are first pregnant, you will have to ease yourself into the exercise routine post pregnancy as well. You should only really start exercising when you feel steady again. This can be immediately after delivery, but start gradually and increase as time goes along. Try to continue for three months for best effect. Hopefully by this time it becomes a habit.

Pelvic Floor Strengtheners

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Tighten the muscles of the vagina as if trying to interrupt the flow of urine when going to the bathroom.
- Hold for a count of 4, then release

This exercise is perfect for improving circulation in the pelvic region, as well as keeping the vaginal canal in shape.

Head and Shoulder Raisers

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your hands behind your head.
- Take a breath and, as you exhale, tighten your abdominal muscles, flatten the small of your back against the floor, and raise your head and shoulders off the ground. Slowly lower and repeat the entire sequence eight to 10 times

The Pelvic Tilt

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Inhale and allow your abdomen to expand.
- Exhale and lift your tailbone toward your navel, keeping your hips on the floor
- At the top of the tilt, tighten your buttocks, then release. Repeat eight to 10 times

You must remember that you need to get back into your exercise routine slowly. It is also a good idea to do these exercises in conjunction with cardiovascular work, such as walking, swimming, and light weight training.



Swim Swim and SWIM!

Swimming does WONDERS for relieving aches and pains. The buoyancy and resistance of the water give your body many benefits.

During pregnancy your body is taking on than it's used to - higher fluid volume, larger uterus, amniotic fluid, placenta, and of course, baby - so the weightlessness of the water is a perfect solution.

Assuming we have given the OK to exercise, we then recommend water walking or jogging, aqua size (water aerobics) or swimming laps. If none of these forms appeals to you, you are still encouraged to get in the water and just move around - you'll be amazed at the results!

Try to swim 2-3 times a week.

Do not attempt swimming exercises when you are pregnant until you have cleared to do so by your health care provider

When you swim:

In the open sea

- Preferably not.
- IF you prefer then pick an area that has no waves and no currents.
- Have someone else who is a good swimmer with you all the time.

In a swimming pool:

- Make sure it is a clean swimming pool with proper infection control
- Stay in the shallow end of the pool, unless you are really a very good swimmer.
- Stay near a support railing or the side wall of the pool
- Better have some one else who can look after you in case of any problems.
- Do not go in the pool unless you are accompanied by some one or there people around.

...



and then, you need to STRETCH!

Stretching is one of the BEST pain-relievers for pregnant women.

Stretching has many benefits - it increases energy, improves posture, decreases stress, oxygenates the muscles and increases your sense of well-being.

Ideally, you should be stretching your body from **head to toe** and REALLY concentrating on releasing the tension from the muscles you've worked that day. For example, if you walked uphill, you need to stretch your thigh and calf muscles.

When you do it, make sure you breathe (your muscles NEED the oxygen to relax!) and hold the stretch for at least 30 seconds, preferably 1 minute.

Stretching is your **MAGIC PILL** for a painless pregnancy - learning HOW to stretch all of the muscles in your body is your best investment.

For now, though, let's get you started with **3 Staple Stretches...**

Note: don't forget to get our OK before doing ANY stretches or exercise during your pregnancy. Do it at your own pace, do not over work your self, stop before exhaustion. A good tip is to be able to talk during exercise.

Do not exercise if you have any bleeding, tummy contractions or watery vaginal discharge, or you think you may have an infection (itching and irritation in your front passage or if you have pain passing urine until we check first.

Do not exercise if you have any of the following:

- Heart Problems
- Asthma or Chronic Lung Problems
 - High Blood Pressure
- Extreme weight problems (Under or Over)
 - Muscle or Joint Problems
 - History of premature labour
 - History of several miscarriages
 - Multiple Pregnancy
 - History of Incompetent Cervix
 - Persistent Bleeding
- Placental Problems (Previa, etc.)

1. Hamstring Stretch

Stand up straight, place one foot in front of you, leaning on a chair. Tilt your toes up towards your nose and lean forward (pushing from your lower back) until you feel the stretch. Do not round your back!

2. Calf Stretch (to relieve/prevent those leg cramps!)

Stand with the ball of your foot on the edge of a stair (using your other leg for support), slowly press your heel down towards the floor and hold.

3. Cat Stretch (to relieve/prevent your back pains!)

Kneel on all-4's, round your back up to the ceiling as high as it will go (like a cat!). Pretend you're pulling your belly button in towards your spine.



Bottom line...

Just as you brush your teeth every day, I encourage you to do at least a couple of KEY stretches every day to ward off any unwanted aches and pains, especially for your lower back and legs.

Have an ACHE-FREE weekend

There are quite a few ways to get some easy exercise into your day:

- Take the stairs whenever possible.
- Park further away and walk to stores.
 - Walk to do short errands.
- Use a video if you can't get to the gym.
- Walk around the house or up and down stairs while commercials are on television.
 - Schedule your workout like any other appointment.
 - Get up to change the television channels.