

Pregnancy and Exercise

Exercising during pregnancy can provide many benefits when combined with a healthy diet. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) recommends that pregnant women exercise at a moderate level for 20 to 30 minutes, three times a week.

Many local health clubs and park districts offer exercise programs designed specifically for pregnant women. These programs can be a great way to stay in shape during pregnancy while building a social support network.

It is important to consult with your doctor before starting any exercise program, especially if you are pregnant. If you followed an exercise program before getting pregnant, check with your doctor to determine if it is safe to continue your program or if you need to make changes to your routine.

Read more to learn about exercising during pregnancy.

Benefits of Exercise During Pregnancy

Some of the benefits of exercise are that it:

- Relieves discomfort by increasing circulation
- Increases energy and endurance levels, which can be helpful during labor
- Prepares the body for delivery
- Improves mood and increases self-esteem
- Helps with the challenge of post-delivery weight loss
- Promotes better sleep

Guidelines for Pregnant Women

The ACOG offers the following guidelines for pregnant women:

- Start slowly, especially if you did not exercise before pregnancy. Always talk to your doctor about starting an exercise program and listen to your body for signals that you are pushing it too hard.
- Avoid exercises that require lying on your back after 20 weeks since this position can decrease the blood flow to your uterus.
- Avoid contact or high-risk sports and activities. Stick to low-risk exercises such as walking, water aerobics, biking, swimming or low-impact aerobics. Look for classes designed for pregnant women to help ensure that you will not be doing exercises that place too much strain on your body.
- Be sure to include a five-minute aerobic warm-up and a 10 to 15 minute aerobic cooldown period during each exercise session. Also include some gentle stretching exercises as a part of your cool-down routine.

- Keep your body hydrated and avoid exercising in hot or humid conditions.
- Avoid bouncy or jerky movements.
- Never exercise to the point of exhaustion.
- Take extra care during the third trimester, since your balance may be affected by the changes in your body.
- Talk to your doctor about increasing your caloric intake, especially if you are exercising regularly. Pregnant women need approximately 300 extra calories per day.

Warning Signs

If you experience any of the following while exercising, stop and immediately call your doctor:

- Pain, especially in your back or pelvic region
- Excessive fatigue
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling faint
- Vaginal bleeding
- Difficulty walking
- Contractions
- Unusual absence of fetal movements

Exercises for Pregnant Women

The following are safe and easy exercises that you can incorporate into your pregnancy exercise routine:

- **Walking:** This is the safest and easiest way to incorporate exercise into your pregnancy. Walking is especially recommended for women who did not exercise before getting pregnant. Even a short walk around the neighborhood one to two times a day can provide you with health benefits.
- **Low-impact aerobics:** There are many aerobics classes designed for pregnant women; these classes will help to ensure that you are exercising in a way that will not have adverse effects on your pregnancy.
- **Swimming:** One of the best exercises for pregnant women is swimming since it uses many different muscle groups without putting additional strain on the joints.
- **Kegel exercises:** Tightening the muscles that help control the flow of urine can help you learn how to control the muscle that aids in giving birth. These exercises can decrease the need for an episiotomy and ease some of the pain of childbirth. Try tightening these muscles many times a day, holding the muscles tight for five to 10 seconds before releasing.
- **Tailor sit:** This exercise can help to stretch your inner thighs while relaxing your pelvic muscles, which can help during the delivery. To do the tailor sit, begin by sitting on a firm surface. Bring your feet in close to your body and cross your ankles. Sit in this position as often as possible for as long as it is comfortable. To relieve tension in your lower back, bend forward, and let your arms rest on the floor in front of your legs.

- **Tailor press:** This exercise can help to stretch and tone your thigh muscles. To do the tailor press, begin by sitting on a firm surface. Place the soles of your feet together and draw them as close to your body as comfortable. Press your knees down toward the floor with your muscles. Hold for five seconds.
- **Squats:** Learning how to squat properly can be helpful particularly if you have other children who need you to help them take baths or pick up toys. It stretches the inner thighs and helps prepare your lower body for birth. While holding onto a partner or a chair back, slowly go down into a squat, stopping as low as you can go but before your heels come up off the floor. Practice this several minutes a day. This position can even be used while giving birth.
- **Pelvic rock:** This exercise promotes good pelvic alignment and posture, strengthens abdominal and back muscles, relieves backache and reduces stress. It can be done lying down (only up until the fourth month), on your hands and knees or standing with your back against a wall. Stand against the wall with your knees slightly bent and, as you inhale, gently press the small of your back against the wall. Exhale and release. Repeat this exercise 10 times.

Resources

- Health Resources and Services Administration: www.mchb.hrsa.gov
- National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition: www.hmhb.org
- Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.womenshealth.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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