



Exercise in Pregnancy

Is exercise safe in pregnancy?

For mothers with a healthy, normal pregnancy, exercise can be safe and beneficial. There are a few conditions which might limit the exercises you should do, so make sure to check with your caregiver before beginning a fitness program. Only by taking a full medical history can your health care provider recommend a routine that will be right for you and your baby.

The benefits of exercise.

- Boosts energy level. Can make you feel more like your 'normal self'.
- Releases endorphins, natural chemicals which help you feel better.
- Relieve backaches and improve posture by strengthening and toning muscles.
- Helps you sleep better at night.
- Helps you prepare for birth – Strong muscles and a healthy heart can ease labor and delivery. Improved endurance is helpful for long labors.
- You will tend to gain less fat during your pregnancy, which means you'll return to your normal size and shape more quickly after birth. Better health before labor leads to a speedier recovery after birth.

American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists recommends the following tips:

1. Regular exercise (at least three times per week) is preferable to intermittent activity.
2. Assuming that a woman doesn't have any risk factors for adverse maternal or perinatal outcome, she can exercise and derive benefits from participating in mild to moderate intensity exercise routines.
3. Working heart rates should be measured during peak levels of activity to ensure that exercise intensity is within desired range.
4. Extremes of joint flexion and extension (such as deep knee bends and ballistic hyperextension of the knees) should be avoided.
5. Pregnant women should avoid exercising in the supine position (on their backs) after the first trimester.
6. Pregnant women should be aware of the decreased oxygen available for aerobic exercise and should be encouraged to modify exercise intensity according to maternal symptoms. Pregnant women should stop exercising when fatigued and not exercise to exhaustion.
7. Prolonged periods of motionless standing should be avoided.
8. Avoid exercises in which loss of balance could be detrimental to maternal or fetal well-being, especially in the third trimester. Any type of exercise involving the potential for even mild abdominal trauma should be avoided.
9. Women who exercise during pregnancy should be particularly careful to ensure an adequate diet.
10. Women should gradually increase exercise intensity after delivery.

Limits/Warning Signs

Listen to your body's warning signals. If your body says "Stop!" then stop! Be alert for any of these warning signs during exercise:

- vaginal bleeding
- unusual pain

- dizziness or lightheadedness
- unusual shortness of breath
- racing heartbeat or chest pain
- fluid leaking from your vagina
- uterine contractions

If you can't talk while you're exercising, you're doing too much. Keep heart rate below 160 beats per minute. It's harmful to your baby to become overheated, so don't overdo exercise on hot days.

Appropriate activities: Activities that can be started during pregnancy, even by those not currently participating in an exercise program are: low impact aerobics, cycling/stationary biking, golf, stair climbing, swimming, walking, water aerobics, yoga, dancing. Walking, prenatal yoga, and swimming / water aerobics are probably the three best exercises for pregnancy. Try for a combination of cardio (aerobic), strength, and flexibility exercises, and avoid bouncing.

Activities To Avoid: These activities should be avoided because of risk to the mother or baby. Competitive sports, hang gliding, horseback riding, scuba diving, sky diving, snow skiing, water skiing. Avoid activities that include bouncing, leaping, jarring, a sudden change of direction, or a risk of abdominal injury.

For more information on pregnancy:

See our books: *Pregnancy, Childbirth & the Newborn* or *The Simple Guide to Having a Baby*.
Take a childbirth preparation class at Great Starts, or in your local community.

For parenting tips, information for families, or to talk to someone about parenting:

In Washington State: Call the Family Help Line at 1-800-932-HOPE

Outside of WA: contact your local Circle of Parents agency at www.circleofparents.org