

Exercising During Pregnancy

Maintaining a regular exercise routine throughout your pregnancy can help you stay healthy and feel your best. Regular exercise during pregnancy can improve your posture and decrease some common discomforts such as backaches and fatigue.



If you were physically active before your pregnancy, you should be able to continue your activity in moderation. Don't try to exercise at your former level; instead, do what's most comfortable for you now. Low impact aerobics are encouraged versus high impact. Do not let your heart rate exceed 140 beats per minute.

If you have never exercised regularly before, you can safely begin an exercise program during pregnancy after consulting with your health care provider, but do not try a new, strenuous activity. Walking is considered safe to initiate when pregnant.

Who Should Not Exercise?

If you have a medical problem, such as asthma, heart disease or diabetes, exercise may not be advisable. Exercise may also be harmful if you have an obstetric condition such as:

- Bleeding or spotting
- Low placenta
- Threatened or recurrent miscarriage
- Previous premature births or history of early labor
- Weak cervix

Talk with your health care provider before beginning an exercise program. Your health care provider can give you personal exercise guidelines, based on your medical history.

What Exercises Are Safe During Pregnancy?

Most exercises are safe to perform during pregnancy, as long as you exercise with caution and do not overdo it.

The safest and most productive activities are swimming, brisk walking, indoor stationary cycling and low-impact aerobics (taught by a certified aerobics instructor). These activities carry little risk of injury, benefit your entire body, and can be continued until birth.

Tennis and racquetball are generally safe activities, but your change in balance during pregnancy may affect rapid movements. Other activities such as jogging can be done in

moderation. You may want to choose exercises or activities that do not require great balance or coordination, especially later in pregnancy.

To learn strength and toning exercises that are safe to do during pregnancy, see [Sample Exercises](#) below..

What Exercises Should Be Avoided During Pregnancy?

There are certain exercises and activities that can be harmful if performed during pregnancy. Avoid:

- Holding your breath during any activity
- Activities where falling is likely (such as skiing and horseback riding)
- Contact sports such as softball, football, basketball and volleyball
- Any exercise that may cause even mild abdominal trauma such as activities that include jarring motions or rapid changes in direction
- Activities that require extensive jumping, hopping, skipping, bouncing or running
- Deep knee bends, full sit-ups, double leg raises and straight-leg toe touches
- Bouncing while stretching
- Exercises that require lying on your back or right side for more than three minutes (especially after your third month of pregnancy)
- Waist twisting movements while standing
- Heavy exercise spurts followed by long periods of no activity
- Exercise in hot, humid weather



What Should an Exercise Program Consist of?

For total fitness, an exercise program should strengthen and condition your muscles.

Always begin by warming up for five minutes and stretching for five minutes. Include at least fifteen minutes of cardiovascular activity. Measure your heart rate at times of peak activity (your heart rate may range from 140-160 beats per minute during activity). Follow aerobic activity with five to ten minutes of gradually slower exercise that ends with gentle stretching.

Here are some basic exercise guidelines:

- Wear loose fitting, comfortable clothes as well as a good support bra.
- Choose shoes that are designed for the type of exercise you do. Proper shoes are your best protection against injury.
- Exercise on a flat, level surface to prevent injury.
- Consume enough calories to meet the needs of your pregnancy (300 more calories per day than before you were pregnant) as well as your exercise program.

- Finish eating at least one hour before exercising.
- Drink water before, during and after your workout.
- After doing floor exercises, get up slowly and gradually to prevent dizziness.
- Never exercise to the point of exhaustion. If you cannot talk normally while exercising, you are probably over-exerting yourself and should slow down your activity.



What Physical Changes May Affect My Ability to Exercise?

Physical changes during pregnancy create extra demands on your body. Keeping in mind the changes listed below, remember that you need to listen to your body and adjust your activities or exercise routine as necessary.

- Your developing baby and other internal changes require more oxygen and energy.
- Hormones produced during pregnancy cause the ligaments that support your joints to stretch, increasing the risk of injury.
- The extra weight and the uneven distribution of your weight shift your center of gravity. The extra weight also puts stress on joints and muscles in the lower back and pelvic area and makes it easier for you to lose your balance.

Warning

Stop exercising and consult your health care provider if you:

- Feel pain
- Have abdominal pain, pelvic pain or persistent contractions
- Notice an absence of fetal movement
- Feel faint, dizzy, nauseous or light-headed
- Feel cold or clammy
- Have vaginal bleeding
- Have a sudden gush of fluid from the vagina or a trickle of fluid that leaks steadily
- Notice an irregular or rapid heartbeat
- Have sudden swelling in your ankles, hands or face
- Are short of breath
- Have difficulty walking

How Soon Can I Exercise After Delivery?

It is best to ask your health care provider how soon you can begin your exercise routine after delivering your baby.

Although you may be eager to get in shape quickly, return to your pre-pregnancy fitness routines gradually. Follow your health care provider's exercise recommendations.

Most women can safely perform a low-impact activity one to two weeks after a vaginal birth (or three to four weeks after a cesarean birth). Do about half of your normal floor exercises and don't try to overdo it. Wait until about six weeks after birth before running or participating in other high impact activities.

Sample Exercises

Exercising while pregnant

Here are some exercises that will help you stay fit during your pregnancy.

Remember: Before you start any exercise program, consult with your health care provider. Your health care provider can give you personal exercise guidelines, based on your medical history.



Stretching Exercises

Stretching exercise make the muscles limber and warm. Here are some simple stretches you can perform before or after exercise.

- **Neck rotation.** Relax your neck and shoulders. Drop your head forward. Slowly rotate your head to your right shoulder, back to the middle and over the left shoulder. Complete four, slow rotations in each direction.
- **Shoulder rotation.** Bring your shoulders forward and then rotate them up toward your ears and then back down. Do four rotations in each direction.
- **Swim.** Place your arms at your sides. Bring your right arm up and extend your body forward and twist to the side, as if swimming the crawl stroke. Follow with left arm. Do the sequence ten times.
- **Thigh shift.** Stand with one foot about two feet in front of the other, toes pointed in the same direction. Lean forward, supporting your weight on the forward thigh. Change sides and repeat. Do four on each side.
- **Leg shake.** Sit with your legs and feet extended. Move the legs up and down in a gentle shaking motion.
- **Ankle rotation.** Sit with your legs extended and keep your toes relaxed. Rotate your feet, making large circles. Use your whole foot and ankle. Rotate four times on the right and four times on the left.

Kegel Exercise

Kegel exercises help strengthen the muscles that support the bladder, uterus and bowels. By strengthening these muscles during your pregnancy, you can develop the ability to relax and control the muscles in preparation for labor and birth. Kegel exercises are also highly recommended during the postpartum period to promote the healing of perineal tissues, increase the strength of the pelvic floor muscles and help these muscles return to a healthy state, including increased urinary control.

To do kegels, imagine you are trying to stop the flow of urine or trying not to pass gas. When you do this, you are contracting the muscles of the pelvic floor and are practicing Kegel exercises. While doing Kegel exercises, try not to move your leg, buttock or abdominal muscles. In fact, no one should be able to tell that you are doing Kegel exercises. (So you can do them anywhere!)

Kegel exercises should be done every day. We recommend doing five sets of Kegel exercises a day. Each time you contract the muscles of the pelvic floor, hold for a slow count of five and then relax. Repeat this ten times for one set of Kegels.

Tailor Exercises

Tailor exercises strengthen the pelvic, hip and thigh muscles and can help relieve low back pain.

- **Tailor sit.** Sit with your knees bent and ankles crossed. Lean slightly forward, and keep your back straight but relaxed. Use this position whenever possible throughout the day.
- **Tailor press.** Sit with your knees bent and the soles of your feet together. Grasp your ankles and pull your feet gently toward your body. Place your hands under your knees. Inhale. While pressing your knees down against your hands, press your hands up against your knees (counter-pressure). Hold for a count of five.

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