

9056 - Pregnancy and Exercise Do's & Don'ts



In 2002, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) published their latest pregnancy recommendations which stated that a healthy pregnant woman with a non-complicated pregnancy, not only could exercise, but should exercise.

Exercise can help ease or even prevent discomfort, boost your energy level and improve your overall health. Exercise also helps you prepare for labour by increasing your stamina and muscle strength. Being in good shape may even shorten your labour and speed your recovery.

Getting the OK

Before you begin an exercise program, make sure you have your health care provider's OK. Although exercise during pregnancy is generally good for both mother and baby, you'll need to proceed with caution if you have a history of preterm labour or certain medical conditions, including:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Placenta previa, a problem with the placenta that can cause excessive bleeding before or during delivery

FITT: Frequency, Intensity, Time and Type:

In the past, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommended a heart rate of no more than 140 beats a minute for exercise during pregnancy. Today, however, the ACOG recommends 30 minutes of exercise a day during pregnancy for most women without any specific heart rate limits.

In general, you should be able to carry on a conversation while you're exercising. If you can't speak normally while you're working out, you're probably pushing yourself too hard. This could lead to overheating, dehydration or other problems.

Walking is a great exercise for beginners. It provides moderate aerobic conditioning with minimal stress on your joints. Other good choices include swimming, rowing and cycling on a stationary bike. Strength training is OK, too, as long as you avoid lifting **really heavy** weights.

If you exercised before pregnancy, you can probably continue to work out at the same level while you're pregnant — as long as you're feeling comfortable and your health care provider says it's OK. If you haven't exercised for a while, begin with as little as five minutes of physical activity a day. Build up to 10 minutes, 15 minutes, and so on, until you reach at least 30 minutes a day. Remember to warm up before and stretch after each workout. Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated, and be careful to avoid overheating. No matter how dedicated you are to being in shape, don't exercise to the point of exhaustion.

Here are some basic exercise guidelines for pregnant women:

- 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 from healthy foods 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.



5 Tips to Modify Exercises While Pregnant

1. Modify your cardiovascular routine to avoid high impact movements. If you do high impact aerobics or running for your cardiovascular routine, switch to low impact aerobics, speed walking or elliptical training. You want to avoid any movements that will be jarring to the baby. Running in place underwater in a pool is an excellent low-impact exercise.
2. Move abdominal exercises from the floor to a stability ball. Lying down on the floor on your back after the first trimester can restrict blood flow and cause dizziness, nausea and shortness of breath. A stability ball provides cushioning for the spine as well as a greater range of motion.
3. Use a stability ball to modify squats. In later pregnancy when balance becomes an issue, using a stability ball between your back and a wall can help support your body while doing squats. The ball rolls down the ball as you lower your body.
4. Avoid exercise that requires you to rest on your stomach or chest. These exercises can be modified to prevent torso compression. For example, rather than using a leg curl machine, get down on all fours and do leg lifts.
5. Adjust the frequency of your exercise program as your endurance diminishes. In the later months of pregnancy, the extra weight can decrease your ability to work out as much. Don't push your endurance level past what your body can handle.

What Pregnancy Changes May Affect 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.

What Exercises Should Be Avoided During Pregnancy?

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

- 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.
- Waist-twisting movements while standing.
- Heavy exercise spurts followed by long periods of no activity.
- Exercise in hot, humid weather.

Activities to approach with care

If you're not sure whether a particular activity is safe during pregnancy, check with your health care provider. Unless you've made special preparations, your health care provider may discourage underwater and high-altitude activities, such as scuba diving and hiking at high altitudes. As your pregnancy progresses, you may need to avoid activities that require you to jump or have a high risk of falling, such as; water skiing, downhill skiing and in-line skating. As you get larger, you're more likely to fall. Although you're not likely to hurt the baby, you may risk joint, bone and muscle injuries.

Staying motivated

You're more likely to stick with an exercise plan if it involves activities you enjoy and fits into your daily schedule. Consider these simple tips:

- **Start small.** You don't need to join a gym or don expensive workout clothes to get in shape. Just get moving. Try a daily walk through your neighbourhood. Vary your route to keep it interesting.
- **Find a partner.** Exercise can be more interesting if you use the time to chat with a friend. Better yet, involve the whole family.
- **Use a headset.** Listen to music or a book while you exercise. Use lively songs to energize your workout.
- **Try a class.** Many fitness centers and hospitals offer classes designed for pregnant women. Choose one that fits your interests and schedule.
- **Get creative.** Don't limit yourself. Consider hiking, rowing or dancing.

Give yourself permission to rest. Your tolerance for strenuous exercise will decrease as your pregnancy progresses. Listen to your body. As important as it is to exercise, it's also important to watch for danger signs. Stop exercising and consult your health care provider if you:

- Feel chest pain.
- Have abdominal pain, pelvic pain, or persistent contractions.
- Have a headache.
- Notice an absence or decrease in 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, face, or calf pain.
- Are short of breath.
- Have difficulty walking.
- Have muscle weakness.
- Blurred vision
- Fatigue
- If you don't feel better quickly after you stop exercising, contact your health care provider.

Source: Mayo Clinic