

Exercising During Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a great time to adopt a healthier lifestyle and kickstart your fitness. There are many benefits to exercising during pregnancy for both you and your baby!

BENEFITS OF EXERCISING DURING PREGNANCY

- Reduce excessive weight gain¹⁻⁷
- Maintain or improve cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility⁷
- Improve your posture and body mechanics⁷
- Improve sleep, mood, and self-esteem^{7, 8}
- Reduce stress and risk for depression⁹⁻¹²
- Reduce minor discomforts of pregnancy⁷
- Prevent complications related to gestational diabetes, hypertension, and preeclampsia^{7, 13-25}
- Reduce risk of having low back pain^{7, 26}
- Prevent urinary incontinence²⁷⁻²⁸
- Decrease length of labor²⁹
- Reduce risk of cesarean birth^{30, 31}
- Reduce risk of preterm birth³²
- Improve ability to cope with pain during childbirth and postpartum³³
- Reduce risk of having a very large baby (macrosomia)^{2, 32, 34}
- Babies born to women who exercise during pregnancy have higher APGAR scores³⁵
- Children score higher on tests assessing mental performance, general intelligence, and oral language skills³⁶
- Children are more likely to maintain a healthy body weight^{37, 38}

SAFETY TIPS

- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after exercise.
- Avoid exercising in a hot, humid environment.³⁹
- 10% of women may experience something called supine hypotensive syndrome or aortocaval occlusion. Symptoms include shortness of breath, dizziness, restlessness, nausea, numbness or tingling in your limbs, and visual disturbances. If this happens, simply roll over on to your left side until symptoms subside and avoid exercising in this position in the future⁴⁰.

- Be cautious when performing large asymmetrical movements and stretches such as the Warrior poses in yoga. These movements may increase risk of pelvic girdle injury during pregnancy due to ligamentous laxity⁴¹.
- Be cautious when lifting heavy weights.⁴²⁻⁴⁴ You may not be able to lift as heavy as usual and that is okay!
- When performing resistance training, always exhale during the exertion phase. For example, during squats, inhale as you lower your body and exhale as you raise back up. Think about engaging your deep core (hugging baby in) as you exhale.
- Monitor for coning in your midline (bulging at your bellybutton, above, or below it). Avoid any exercises that cause this to happen and consult with your physical therapist for appropriate modifications.
- Watch out for signs of overtraining such as extreme fatigue and poor weight gain⁴².

GETTING STARTED

- Before beginning an exercise program consult with your health care provider.
- If you have been placed on activity restrictions, be sure that you understand the full extent of these restrictions.
- If you have not been placed on activity restrictions, walking is generally a safe exercise for beginners⁴⁵. It is low impact and does not require any additional equipment or gym membership.
- Other types of exercise that are safe to initiate or continue during pregnancy include low-impact aerobics, swimming, stationary cycling, yoga, Pilates, running, racquet sports, and strength training⁴⁵.
- If you were already exercising before becoming pregnant, it is generally safe to continue exercising at the same frequency and intensity with modifications when appropriate⁴⁵.
- If you are just starting out, try beginning with just 20 minutes of exercise 3 days a week and gradually build your way up to 30 minutes or more 5 days a week^{7, 45}. Some women find it easier to break it up into shorter bouts of exercise multiple times a day due to increasing fatigue levels.

These are just general recommendations. Your physical therapist can help you develop an exercise program that is specific to your individual needs and capabilities.

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