

Exercise in Pregnancy

Exercise makes you feel good and look good but setting up a safe exercise program is particularly important during pregnancy. You should assess the risks of any program that could affect both you and your growing baby. You should be able to establish an appropriate exercise program by providing information about the kind, frequency, and intensity of exercise to which you were accustomed prep-pregnancy.

Exercise during pregnancy is different for several reasons. Because of the hormone relaxin, your ligaments become easier to stretch. Relaxin may also cause you to feel wobbly while walking and increase risk of sprains and pulled muscles. As your baby grows, your weight distribution is different and your center of gravity changes, which may make it easier for you to lose your balance. Your ability to catch your breath (get enough oxygen) is decreased during exercise. Because of these changes in your breathing and circulation systems you may occasionally experience dizziness or weakness. Now, when you exercise, you will notice you do not have the aerobic capacity you had before pregnancy. With some adjustments you can continue to enjoy exercising and return slowly to your desired program after your baby is born and your body is ready.

Safe Exercise Guidelines

- Drink enough before exercising, even in the winter
- Warm up slowly, at least five minutes before starting
- Stretch, but not to your limit so as not to injure your ligaments, as they are looser now
- Avoid exercises with jerky or bouncing motions
- Use a stable floor. Avoid loose rugs that may slide
- Exercise regularly (every other day), not just once in a while
- No competitive exercises
- Do not exercise during hot humid weather or if you have a fever
- Your body temperature should not go above 38 degree C. (101 degrees F.). Avoid the use of hot tubs and saunas.
- After the 4th month, do not exercise lying down on your back
- No weight lifting or anything where you hold your breath and strain
- During pregnancy caloric intake is to be over and above your usual need. Adjust it to your level of activity
- Avoid strenuous exercise at high altitudes

Choose exercise shoes that feel secure and help your balance. Support hose can help your legs feel better during and after exercise. Watch how you put your feet down, especially if you are planning to walk and there is ice outside. If you need to increase your bra size you might go right into a nursing bra if you plan to nurse, or you may need an athletic bra for more support during your workouts. Put your feet up with pride, this allows any swelling of your ankles to go down. Your body is working hard helping your baby grow, 24 hours a day!

It is NOT a good idea to take up a new sport while pregnant. But you can begin something that is on the "good for pregnancy" list, that will give you a head start in beginning tennis after your baby is born. Some good sports are, Yoga (without breath holding), swimming, pregnancy classes, stationary bicycling (gently), easy stretching (but not to your limit), and don't forget about daily walking in fresh air!

If you are exercising because of fears of excessive weight gain, remember that being pregnant is not being fat. Gaining twenty-five to thirty-five pounds during pregnancy is healthy. Your baby's size and health depends on increased nutrition (keeping in mind that junk food, such as candy, cola, and chips, are full of empty calories and often artificial ingredients that are not healthy for your pregnancy). You must normally INCREASE calories during your pregnancy to about three hundred calories per day and INCREASE calories and fluid over and above that for exercise. If you do not have enough calories, your body can go into a chemical state called ketosis which can cause developmental problems for your baby. If you do not get enough calories regularly during pregnancy your baby may not grow as well.

If you stopped exercising regularly a few months ago, and want to start back up, begin very slowly with low intensity. Remember, even if you are in great shape, you will not be able to do what you did pre-pregnancy. Pregnancy is a special time and requires special, not lower, goals to help you and your developing baby feel happy and stay well.

Avoid saunas, hot tubs, steam rooms, or excessively hot showers. During the first twelve weeks of pregnancy, the high body heat generated from these activities may have harmful effects on your pregnancy. There is a small possibility that the brain and spine areas of your baby may not form the right way.

Warning Signs during Exercise

If any of the following happen while exercising, stop immediately and contact your doctor:

- Regular contraction.
- Vaginal bleeding or leaking of fluid
- Blacking out or fainting
- Shortness of breath
- Pain
- Racing heartbeat that does not pass
- Anything else that concerns you

Avoiding Exercise

You should avoid exercise if:

- Are prone to early labor

- Are excessively overweight or underweight
- Have blood pressure, heart, lung, or thyroid problems
- Have experienced vaginal bleeding during the pregnancy
- Your pregnancy is not growing properly
- Are severely anemic
- Have leaking from your amniotic sac
- Have experienced 1, 3, 5, or 7 during a previous pregnancy