



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
OBSTETRICIANS AND
GYNECOLOGISTS

Exercise During Pregnancy

Regular exercise builds bones and muscles, gives you energy, and keeps you healthy. It is just as important when you are pregnant.

Benefits of Exercise

Becoming active and exercising at least 30 minutes on most, if not all, days of the week can benefit your health in the following ways:

- Helps reduce backaches, constipation, bloating and swelling
- May help prevent or treat gestational diabetes
- Increases your energy
- Improves your mood
- Improves your posture
- Promotes muscle tone, strength and endurance
- Helps you sleep better

Changes in Your Body

Pregnancy causes many changes in your body. Some of these changes will affect your ability to exercise.

Joints

The hormones produced during pregnancy cause the ligaments that support your joints to become relaxed.

Balance

Remember that during pregnancy you are carrying extra pounds — as much as 25 to 40 pounds at the end of pregnancy. The extra weight in the front of your body shifts your center of gravity and places stress on joints and muscles, especially those in the pelvis and lower back.

Heart Rate

The extra weight you are carrying will make your body work harder than before you were pregnant. Exercise increases the flow of oxygen and blood to the muscles being worked and away from other parts of your body. So, it's important not to overdo it.

Getting Started

Before beginning your exercise program, talk with your doctor to make sure you do not have any obstetric or health condition that would limit your activity.

Choosing Safe Exercises

Most forms of exercise are safe during pregnancy. However, some types of exercise involve positions and movements that may be uncomfortable, tiring or harmful for pregnant women. For instance, after the first trimester of pregnancy, women should not do exercises that require them to lie flat on their backs.

Certain sports are safe during pregnancy, even for beginners:

- Walking is a good exercise for anyone.
- Swimming is great for your body.
- Cycling provides a good aerobic workout.
- Aerobics is a good way to keep your heart and lungs strong.

Other exercises, if done in moderation, are safe for women who have done them for a while before pregnancy:

- Running
- Racquet sports
- Strength training

The following activities should be avoided during pregnancy:

- Downhill snow skiing
- Contact sports
- Scuba diving

Your Routine

Exercise during pregnancy is most practical during the first 24 weeks. During the last three months, it can be difficult to do many exercises that once seemed easy. This is normal.

If it has been some time since you've exercised, it is a good idea to start slowly. Begin with as little as five minutes of exercise a day and add five minutes each week until you can stay active for 30 minutes a day.

Always begin each exercise session with a warm-up period for five to 10 minutes.

Things to Watch

The changes your body is going through can make certain positions and activities risky for you and your baby. While exercising, try to avoid activities that call for jumping, jarring motions, or quick changes in direction that may strain your joints and cause injury.

While you exercise, pay attention to your body. Do not exercise to the point that you are exhausted.

After the Baby's Born

Having a baby and taking care of a newborn is hard work. It will take a while to regain your strength after the strain of pregnancy and childbirth. Taking care of yourself physically and allowing your body time to recover is important. If you had a cesarean delivery, difficult childbirth or complications, your recovery time may be longer. Check with your doctor before starting or resuming an exercise program.

Finally ...

Exercise during pregnancy can help prepare you for labor and childbirth. Exercising afterward can help get you back in shape. Before you begin an exercise program, talk to your doctor. Follow this guide to help maintain a safe and healthy exercise program during pregnancy.

This excerpt from ACOG's Patient Education Pamphlet is provided for your information. It is not medical advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for visiting your doctor. If you need medical care, have any questions, or wish to receive the full text of this Patient Education Pamphlet, please contact your obstetrician-gynecologist.

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