

Exercise in Pregnancy

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Why should I exercise in pregnancy?

There are lots of good reasons to keep active when you're pregnant. Exercise improves your muscle tone, strength and endurance, which may make it easier for you to adapt to the changes that pregnancy brings.

Regular exercise will:

- Help you to carry the weight you gain in pregnancy.
- Prepare you for the physical challenge of labour and birth.
- Improve your mood, and give you energy.
- Help you to sleep better.
- Make getting back into shape after your baby is born easier.

What are the best exercises in pregnancy and what should be avoided?

Aerobic exercise, such as swimming, brisk walking and aquanatal classes, are ideal. You can also do some types of muscle-strengthening exercises, such as pregnancy yoga and pilates. Make sure that your instructor is qualified and experienced in teaching pregnant women.

Exercise doesn't have to be formal to count. Regularly walking to work or nearby markets, taking the stairs instead of the lift, and doing gardening and housework, all add up. Try to be active on most days of the week, if not every day, for at least 30 minutes a day.

If you weren't active before you became pregnant, it's best not to suddenly take up strenuous exercise. Start with 15 minutes of continuous exercise, three times a week, and increase this gradually to at least four, 30-minute sessions a week.

Sports that carry a risk of you losing your balance, such as skating, horse riding, skiing and mountain climbing, carry too high a risk of injury to your tummy. Contact sports, such as football and basketball, and racket sports, can also be tough on your knees and ankles, so are best avoided.

Things to remember while exercising in pregnancy?

Get in the habit

If you're committed to keeping fit, exercise at least four or five times a week, for at least 30 minutes at a time.

Warm up before exercising

This will get your muscles and joints ready for activity and help build your heart rate slowly

Keep moving

Standing still for long stretches can decrease the flow of blood to your uterus (womb), and cause blood to pool in your legs. This can make you feel dizzy or faint. So if you feel uncomfortable, change positions, or walk on the spot.

Don't exercise lying flat on your back after 16 weeks of pregnancy

Besides being uncomfortable, this position may cause dizziness. It puts your uterus on top of the vena cava, a major blood vessel, and this may reduce blood flow to your growing baby, and your brain. Prop yourself up on your elbows instead, or lie on your left side.

Take care with awkward positions

You'll need to be careful with the following positions

- sit-ups
- standing on one leg
- moving your legs too far apart

As your centre of gravity shifts during pregnancy, you become more prone to losing your balance. That's why you should take care when you shift positions. Getting up quickly can make you dizzy, and cause you to lose your footing and fall.

Drink lots of water

Take it easy when it's hot and humid outside. Weather like this makes you prone to overheating. Give your workout a miss or exercise indoors in a cool, airy room.

Cool down

Take the time to cool down properly after you exercise. Walk on the spot for a few minutes, stretch and relax. This gives your heart a chance to return gradually to its normal rate.

A good rule of thumb is to slow down if you can't comfortably carry on a conversation.

This pamphlet is intended to provide you with general information. It does not substitute for doctor's advice and does not contain all known facts about exercise in pregnancy