



CURRENT GUIDELINES

for exercise during pregnancy

Regular exercise promotes the health and wellbeing of pregnant women and their unborn babies. The following guidelines are based on the unique physical and physiological conditions that exist during pregnancy. Please consult your physician regarding your exercise program during pregnancy, regardless of whether you are a novice exerciser or have many years of experience.

1. Women who currently participate in a regular exercise program can continue exercising with some modifications to their programs during pregnancy. Those who plan to start an exercise program after becoming pregnant must obtain a physician's approval first.
2. Maintain regular exercise, at least three times per week and, if possible, between 20 to 30 minutes in duration, at a moderate intensity (you should be able to carry on a normal conversation during the activity). Another option is to accumulate activity to shorter periods such as 15 minute sessions.
3. Avoid exercise in the supine position (lying on the back) after the first trimester. This position is associated with decreased cardiac output, which limits the blood flow to the baby.
4. Avoid exercise in hot, humid environments, and always stay well hydrated. This is especially true during the first trimester, which holds the greatest risk of cell malformation. Also avoid saunas and steam baths during pregnancy as these will increase your core temperature.
5. Be aware that your oxygen intake is decreased during aerobic activity, therefore, you will need to modify the intensity of your exercise. Always stop exercise before you feel exhausted. Keep the maximum heart rate at 70 per cent of heart rate reserve (under 150bpm – depending on your age). Check with your trainer for an accurate calculation.
6. You will find there is an increase in your resting heart rate. You may find that by the end of the pregnancy, your resting heart rate will have increased by up to 30 beats per minute. This is completely natural and will return to normal after the birth.
7. You will need to increase your food intake by an additional 300 calories per day, building up to 500 by the third trimester. Women who exercise during pregnancy should be particularly careful to ensure they are eating enough.
8. Eat carbohydrates before exercise, as your blood sugar levels can fluctuate rapidly during pregnancy. Always eat food containing low glycemic index carbohydrates 1 to 2 hours before exercising. If you feel faint or dizzy, slow down or stop exercising and get a carbohydrate snack.
9. Always have a prolonged cool down after the aerobic portion of your workout. Stopping exercise suddenly, or going directly from aerobic exercise to lying on the floor can also have detrimental

effects on the baby. A five minute aerobic warm up, and a 10 to 15 minute aerobic cool down is essential.

10. Stop exercising and consult your physician if you experience any of these symptoms during exercise:
 - Bleeding
 - Cramping
 - Faintness
 - Elevated blood pressure
 - Dizziness
 - Severe joint pain.
11. During pregnancy, all the connective tissue in the body becomes more lax than normal. To help prevent injury, avoid deep flexion and extension of the joints and avoid activities that require jumping or jarring motions or rapid changes in direction. Always brace your abdominal muscles when lifting and maintain good posture to reduce the risk of injury and minimise strain to your joints during and after pregnancy. Stretch gently and remain cautious and gentle with all your stretches.
12. Always wear a good supportive bra while exercising, to avoid overstretching the breast ligaments.
13. After 20 weeks, have your trainer check your abdominal muscles weekly, to determine if the rectus abdominus muscle has separated. This 'gap' which occurs between your abdominal muscles during pregnancy known as diastasis recti and can occur during pregnancy, though often occurs during delivery. If it does occur cease abdominal curls and oblique work, but maintain the deep abdominal bracing exercises.
14. Always maintain correct posture and form during exercise. Have your trainer assess your posture throughout pregnancy, keeping watch for musculoskeletal changes. Brace your abdominal muscles and be aware of your back at all times.
15. Choose a mixture of weight bearing and non weight bearing activities such as walking, low impact aerobics, light weights, yoga, Pilates, cycling, swimming and aqua fitness. Avoid heavy lifting and holding the breath. Do not perform lunges or wide squats and they may lead to lower back pain and/or pubis symphysis pain.
16. Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. Strong pelvic floor muscles will assist with the birth process and recovery and help to prevent stress incontinence.
17. After the birth, return to exercise gradually. Start with gentle abdominal bracing focusing on the pelvic floor and the deep corset muscles. Check with your physician at six weeks post-natal, prior to re-starting an exercise program with your trainer.

By Liz Dene, BHMS

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