

EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY

What are the benefits?

- Avoid excess weight gain
- Reduce the risk of developing gestational diabetes
- Increased energy
- Decrease constipation, hemorrhoids, backaches, pelvic pain & urinary incontinence
- Reduce swelling in extremities
- Improve physical fitness
- May make labor & delivery shorter

How much should I do?

Try for 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise most days of the week. If you didn't exercise before pregnancy, this is a great way to start! Start slow and listen to your body. Walking is a great starting point. Pregnancy is not the time to start training for a marathon or other competition if you have never done that before.

What types of exercises are safe?

Types to avoid:

- Sports that can cause you to fall: rock climbing, horseback riding, skiing, etc.
- Contact sports: soccer, hockey, basketball, etc.
- Overexerting yourself on hot days or doing classes such as hot yoga

Types to do:

- Exercises that you are already comfortable with
- Drink plenty of water. If you feel thirsty, you are likely already dehydrated.
- Slow down or stop exercising if you experience any warning signs (see below).

Common Questions

1. **I didn't exercise before I was pregnant....Can I start now?** Yes! Start slow with 10 minute increments at a time and increase gradually to 30 minutes per day.
2. **Is it safe to do abdominal workouts during pregnancy?** Yes! Strengthening core muscles will help you throughout pregnancy and during labor and delivery. Avoid any exercises where you lay flat on your back after the second trimester, but there are many alternative core-strengthening exercises you can continue doing.
3. **Do you have to keep your heart rate under a certain number while exercising during pregnancy?** No, unfortunately there isn't a target rate that is right for every woman. The "talk test" is a better rule to go by. Make sure you can speak in sentences without gasping for breath during your exercise. This is called RPE or "rate of perceived exertion".

4. **When I exercise, do I take away calories and nutrients that my baby needs?** No, your body is designed to prioritize baby's growth needs. Your blood sugar may drop a little after, so have a healthy snack available to replenish the calories you just burned.
5. **Can I continue running?** Running is perfectly fine during pregnancy, but you may not be able to continue this in the third trimester due to discomfort. You may also find yourself having to go at a slower pace than before as the normal increase in blood volume during pregnancy makes your heart work harder.

Common Concern

I'm afraid to hurt myself. There are two things that put you at an increased risk for injury during pregnancy. The first is that your center of balance is altered after about the 4th month of pregnancy. Be cautious with sports requiring balancing. The second is that your body produces "relaxin" which is a hormone that loosens joints and makes labor and delivery easier. Avoid deep squats and lunges. You will likely become more flexible in pregnancy but stay within your pre-pregnancy limits to avoid injury.

When to stop exercising: (Call your provider if you experience any of these symptoms)

- Vaginal bleeding
- Decreased fetal movement
- Uterine contractions
- Fluid leaking from the vagina
- Muscle weakness
- Calf swelling/pain
- Headache
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Feeling faint

Take Home Points:

- Listen to your body. It will tell you if what you are doing is too much
- Be sure to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration
- There are plenty of exercises that can be continued in pregnancy, just pick the ones you are most comfortable with!
- If you have any questions as to what is safe, always refer to your physician. If your pregnancy becomes more complicated your provider may have you cut back on exercise.