

## Exercise During Pregnancy

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Talk to your health care provider about exercising during pregnancy. For most pregnant women, exercising is safe and healthy for you and your baby. If you and your pregnancy are healthy, exercise won't increase your risk of having a miscarriage (when a baby dies in the womb before 20 weeks of pregnancy), a premature baby (born before 37 weeks of pregnancy) or a baby born with low birthweight (less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces).

### How Much exercise do you need During Pregnancy?

Healthy pregnant women need at least 2½ hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. Aerobic activities make you breathe faster and deeply and make your heart beat faster. Moderate-intensity means you're active enough to sweat and increase your heart rate. Taking a brisk walk is an example of moderate-intensity aerobic activity. If you can't talk normally during an activity, you may be working too hard.

You don't have to do all 2½ hours at once. Instead, break it up through the week. For example, do 30 minutes of exercise on most or all days. If this sounds like a lot, split up the 30 minutes by doing something active for 10 minutes 3 times each day.

### Why is Physical Activity During Pregnancy Good for You?

For healthy pregnant women, regular exercise can:

- Keep your mind and body healthy. Physical activity can help you feel good and give you extra energy. It also makes your heart, lungs and blood vessels strong and helps you stay fit.
- Help you gain the right amount of weight during pregnancy
- Ease some common discomforts of pregnancy, such as constipation, back pain and swelling in your legs, ankles and feet
- Help you manage stress and sleep better. Stress is worry, strain or pressure that you feel in response to things that happen in your life.
- Help reduce your risk of pregnancy complications, like gestational diabetes and preeclampsia. Gestational diabetes is a kind of diabetes that can happen during pregnancy. It happens when your body has too much sugar (called glucose) in the blood. Preeclampsia is a type of high blood pressure some women get after the 20th week of pregnancy or after giving birth. These conditions can increase your risk of having complications during pregnancy, like premature birth (birth before 37 weeks of pregnancy).

- Help reduce your risk of having a cesarean birth (also called c-section). Cesarean birth is surgery in which your baby is born through a cut that your doctor makes in your belly and uterus.
- Prepare your body for labor and birth. Activities such as prenatal yoga and Pilates can help you practice breathing, meditation and other calming methods that may help you manage labor pain. Regular exercise can help give you energy and strength to get through labor.

### What Kinds of Activities are Safe During Pregnancy?

If you're healthy and you exercised before you got pregnant, it's usually safe to continue your activities during pregnancy. Check with your provider to be sure. For example, if you're a runner or a tennis player or you do other kinds of intense exercise, you may be able to keep doing your workouts when you're pregnant. As your belly gets bigger later in pregnancy, you may need to change some activities or ease up on your workouts.

If your provider says it's OK for you to exercise, pick activities you enjoy. If you didn't exercise before you were pregnant, now is a great time to start. Talk to your provider about safe activities. Start slowly and build up your fitness little by little. For example, start with 5 minutes of activity each day, and work your way up to 30 minutes each day.

### These Activities Usually are Safe During Pregnancy:

- **Walking.** Taking a brisk walk is a great workout that doesn't strain your joints and muscles. If you're new to exercise, this is a great activity.
- **Swimming and Water Workouts.** The water supports the weight of your growing baby, and moving against it helps keep your heart rate up. It's also easy on your joints and muscles. If you have low back pain when you do other activities, try swimming.
- **Riding a Stationary Bike.** This is safer than riding a regular bicycle during pregnancy. You're less likely to fall off a stationary bike than a regular bike, even as your belly grows.

- **Yoga and Pilates Classes.** Tell your yoga or Pilates teacher that you're pregnant. The instructor can help you modify or avoid poses that may be unsafe for pregnant women, like lying on your belly or flat on your back (after the first trimester). Some gyms and community centers offer prenatal yoga and Pilates classes just for pregnant women.
- **Low-Impact Aerobics Classes** During low-impact aerobics, you always have one foot on the ground or equipment. . Examples of low-impact aerobics include walking, riding a stationary bike and using an elliptical machine. Low-impact aerobics don't put as much strain on your body that high-impact aerobics do. During high-impact aerobics, both feet leave the ground at the same time. Examples include running, jumping rope and doing jumping jacks. Tell your instructor that you're pregnant so that they can help you modify your workout, if needed.
- **Strength Training.** Strength training can help you build muscle and make your bones strong. It's safe to work out with weights as long as they're not too heavy. Ask your provider about how much you can lift.
- You don't need to belong to a gym or own special equipment to be active. You can walk in a safe area or do exercise videos at home. Or find ways to be active in your everyday life, like doing yard work or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.
- **Placenta Previa after 26 Weeks of Pregnancy.** This is when the placenta lies very low in the uterus and covers all or part of the cervix. The placenta grows in your uterus and supplies the baby with food and oxygen through the umbilical cord. Placenta previa can cause heavy bleeding and other complications later in pregnancy.
- **Severe Anemia or Certain Heart or Lung Conditions.** Anemia is when you don't have enough healthy red blood cells to carry oxygen to the rest of your body. If you have a heart or lung condition, ask your provider if it's safe to exercise during pregnancy.
- **What Kinds of Activities Aren't Safe During Pregnancy?** Be careful and check with your provider when choosing your activities. During pregnancy, do not do:
  - **Any Activity that has a lot of Jerky, Bouncing Movements that may Cause you to Fall,** like horseback riding, downhill skiing, off-road cycling, gymnastics or skating.
  - **Any Sport in which you can get hit in the Belly,** like ice hockey, boxing, soccer or basketball.
  - **Any Exercise that Makes you lie Flat on your Back (After the Third Month of Pregnancy),** like sit-ups. When you lie on your back, your uterus puts pressure on a vein that brings blood to your heart. Lying on your back can cause your blood pressure to drop and limit the flow of blood to your baby.
- **Activities that can Cause you to hit Water with Great Force,** like water skiing, surfing or diving.
- **Skydiving or Scuba Diving.** Scuba diving can lead to decompression sickness. This is when dangerous gas bubbles form in your baby's body.
- **Exercising at High Altitude (More than 6,000 Feet),** unless you live at a high altitude. Altitude is the height of something above the ground. For example, if you're at high altitude, you're probably in the mountains. Exercising at high altitudes during pregnancy can lower the amount of oxygen that reaches your baby.
- **Activities that may make your Body Temperature too High, like Bikram Yoga (Also Called hot Yoga) or Exercising Outside on hot, Humid Days.**
  - During Bikram yoga, you do yoga in a room where the temperature is set to 95 F to 100 F. It's not safe for pregnant women because it can cause hyperthermia, a condition that happens when your body temperature gets too high. Some studies suggest that spending too much time in a sauna or hot tub may make your body temperature too high and increase your risk of having a baby with birth defects. To be safe, don't spend more than 15 minutes at a time in a sauna or more than 10 at a time minutes in a hot tub.
- **Does Pregnancy Change How your Body Responds to Exercise?** During pregnancy, your body changes in many ways. When you're active, you may notice changes in your:
  - **Balance.** You may notice that you lose your balance more easily during pregnancy.

#### Is Physical Activity Safe for all Pregnant Women?

No. For some women, exercise is not safe during pregnancy. Your provider can help you understand if exercise is safe for you. The following conditions may make it unsafe to exercise during pregnancy.

- **Preterm Labor, Bleeding from the Vagina, or Your Water Breaks (Also called Ruptured Membranes).** Preterm labor is labor that happens before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Bleeding from the vagina and having your water break may be signs of preterm labor.
- **Being Pregnant with Twins, Triplets or More (Also Called Multiples) with other Risk Factors for Preterm Labor.** If you're pregnant with multiples, ask your provider if it's safe for you to exercise. Your provider may ask you not to do intense or high-impact activities, like running. You may be able to do low-impact activities, like walking, prenatal yoga or swimming.
- **Cervical Insufficiency or a Cerclage.** The cervix is the opening to the uterus (womb) and is at the top of the vagina. Cervical insufficiency (also called incompetent cervix) means your cervix opens (dilates) too early during pregnancy, usually without pain or contractions. Cervical insufficiency can cause premature birth and miscarriage. If you have cervical insufficiency or a short cervix, your provider may recommend cerclage. This is a stitch your provider puts in your cervix to help keep it closed so that your baby isn't born too early. A short cervix means the length of your cervix (also called cervical length) is shorter than normal.
- **Gestational Hypertension or Preeclampsia.** Gestational hypertension is high blood pressure during pregnancy. It starts after 20 weeks of pregnancy and goes away after you give birth.

- **Body Temperature.** Your body temperature is slightly higher during pregnancy, so you start sweating sooner than you did before pregnancy.
- **Breathing.** As your baby develops and your body changes, you need more oxygen. Your growing belly puts pressure on your diaphragm, a muscle that helps you breathe. You may even find yourself feeling short of breath at times.
- **Energy.** Your body's working hard to take care of your baby, so you may have less energy during pregnancy.
- **Heartrate.** Your heart works harder and beats faster during pregnancy to get oxygen to your baby.
- **Joints.** Your body makes more of some hormones during pregnancy. This can make the tissues that support your joints more relaxed. Try to avoid any movements that may strain or hurt your joints. Hormones are chemicals made by the body.
- **When should you stop Exercising? What are the Warning Signs you Should Watch for When Exercising?**
- When you're being physically active, drink lots of water and pay attention to your body and how you feel. Stop your activity and call your provider if you have any of these signs or symptoms:
  - Bleeding from the vagina or fluid leaking from the vagina
  - Chest pain, fast heartbeat or trouble breathing
  - Feeling dizzy or faint
  - Headache
  - Muscle weakness, trouble walking or pain or swelling in your lower legs. Pain or swelling in your lower legs may be signs of deep vein thrombosis (also called DVT). DVT happens when a blood clot forms in a vein deep in the body, usually in the lower leg or thigh. If untreated, it can cause serious health problems and even death.
  - Regular, painful contractions. A contraction is when the muscles of your uterus get tight and then relax. Contractions help push your baby out of your uterus.
  - Your baby stops moving. This may be a symptom of stillbirth (when a baby dies in the womb after 20 weeks of pregnancy).
- **When can you Start Exercising Again After Giving Birth?** Talk to your health provider to find out when it's OK for you to be active again. If you have a vaginal birth without any complications, it's usually safe to start exercising a few days after you give birth or as soon as you're ready. During vaginal birth, the uterus contracts to help push your baby out of the vagina (birth canal).
- If you have a c-section or a complications during birth, you may need to wait longer to start exercising after birth. Your provider can help you determine when your body is ready for exercise.
- If you were active during pregnancy, it's easier to get back into exercise after your baby is born. Just start slowly. If you feel pain or have other problems during exercise, stop doing the activity and talk to your provider [1-4].

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