

Exercising During Pregnancy

Remaining or becoming active and exercising at least 30 minutes on most, if not all, days of the week can benefit your health during pregnancy 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

Regular activity also helps keep you fit during pregnancy and may improve your ability to cope with labor. This will make it easier for you to get back in shape after the baby is born.

What changes occur in the body during pregnancy that can affect my exercise routine? The hormones produced during pregnancy cause the ligaments that support your joints to become relaxed. This makes the joints more mobile and more at risk of injury. The extra weight in the front of your body during pregnancy shifts your center of gravity and places stress on joints and muscles, especially those in the pelvis and lower back. This can make you less stable, cause back pain, and make you more likely to lose your balance and fall, especially in later pregnancy. The extra weight you are carrying will make your body work harder than before you were pregnant.

What forms of exercise are safe during pregnancy?

- Walking is a good exercise for anyone
- Swimming is great for your body because it works so many muscles
- Cycling provides a good aerobic workout
- Aerobics is a good way to keep your heart and lungs strong
- If you were a runner before you became pregnant, you often can keep running during pregnancy, although you may have to modify your routine
- Yoga promotes strength and flexibility

Many practitioners recommend that women work to strengthen their pelvic floor. The pelvic floor includes the muscles around your vagina, urethra (urinary opening) and anus (bowel opening). Doing exercises, called Kegels, to strengthen these muscles helps support the area under the weight of your baby. Doing Kegels may help you keep control of your bladder during and after pregnancy and can also help prepare you for labor. To do Kegels, follow these steps:

1. Find your pelvic floor muscles. To “find” these muscles, try/ imagine stopping stop the flow of urine or from passing gas. The muscles you contract are your pelvic floor muscles.
2. Practice contracting these muscles for a 10 to 15 count. Then as you release the contraction, count slowly to 10 or 15.
3. Repeat this exercise 10 times.
4. Do a set of 10 Kegels several times a day.
5. Don’t be discouraged if you have problems with urine leaking as pregnancy progresses. Kegels may help to decrease, but not eliminate, urine leakage during pregnancy. If leakage is severe, talk to your provider.

What forms of exercise should be avoided?

In general, activities in which there is a high risk of falling, such as gymnastics, water skiing, and horseback riding, should be avoided. Some racquet sports also increase the risk of falling because of your changing balance. Other sports to avoid include the following:

- Downhill snow skiing —your change in balance may put you at greater risk of injuries and falls. Also, you may be at risk of altitude sickness, an illness caused by breathing air that contains less oxygen.
- Contact sports, such as hockey, basketball, and soccer—these sports can result in harm to you and your baby.
- Scuba diving —Scuba diving can put your baby at risk of decompression sickness, a serious illness that results from changes in the pressure surrounding the body.

Please avoid saunas and hot tubs. These are not safe to use during pregnancy. The hot temperatures may increase your body temperature and harm your developing baby. Baths are fine.