



Plan your exercise routine after you check your medical condition with the doctor. Do not exercise to the point of exhaustion.

We recommend that you maintain an active lifestyle and continue to exercise in moderation throughout your entire pregnancy, unless otherwise instructed by your doctor.

Exercise prepares you for the physical demands of labour and motherhood. It also helps to improve your posture and reduces backache, constipation and leg swelling. You will feel less tired and sleep better. You will also gain less body fat.

If you are a diabetic in pregnancy, you will be able to control your blood sugar better with exercise.

You will also find that you return to your pre-pregnancy fitness and healthy weight faster after your delivery!

## **Plan your exercise routine**

### [Get medical clearance](#)

If you have any obstetric or medical conditions such as persistent vaginal

bleeding, twin pregnancies, history of premature labor, high blood pressure or heart disease, check with your obstetrician before beginning an exercise program. If you have no serious medical problems and have an uncomplicated pregnancy, it is safe for you to perform some form of exercise in moderation.

### Type of exercises

Most forms of exercises are safe during pregnancy. Walking is a great exercise for beginners. It is a good form of aerobic exercise with minimal stress on your joints.

Other suitable exercise for pregnant women include swimming, cycling on a stationary bike, yoga, stretching, low-impact aerobics and pilates. If you were a runner before pregnancy, you should be able to keep running during pregnancy but you may need to reduce your mileage, speed, intensity and go for easier routes.

Avoid contact sports, competitive sports, activities that involve jumping, jarring motions or demand rapid changes of direction. After the first three months of pregnancy, it is best to avoid performing activities while lying on your back, as the weight of the womb may interfere with blood circulation.

Also, avoid standing still for long periods of time. Strength training is safe during pregnancy and helps to keep your muscles strong and prevent aches and pains which are common in pregnancy.

### Exercise schedule

You should aim for 30 minutes of exercise at most, if not all, days of the week. Start slowly if it has been some time since you last worked out.

Begin with five minutes of exercise a day and add five minutes each week until you can stay active for 30 minutes a day.

If you have been exercising before pregnancy, it is probably safe for you to work out at the same level while you are pregnant — as long as you feel comfortable and your obstetrician has given you the green light.

### Exercise intensity

Avoid exercising to the point of exhaustion. Maintain a moderate intensity — if you are able to talk normally while exercising, your exercise intensity is at an acceptable level.

Do not try to exercise beyond your current fitness level. Rest frequently if you are feeling breathless. Work at a level of intensity below your threshold.

### Warm up and cool down

To prepare your muscles and joints, begin each exercise session with a 5 to 10 minute warm up. This consists of light activities such as slow walking and stretching exercises.

After exercising, cool down by slowly reducing your activity and performing stretching exercises to reduce muscle soreness.

### **Additional points to note before you exercise**

- **Hydration:**  
Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise to prevent dehydration and overheating. Avoid exercising under the hot sun and reduce your exercise intensity on hot days.
- **Nutrition:**  
Make sure you consume adequate calories to support your baby's growth and development and your daily needs.
- **Clothing:**  
Wear comfortable and light clothing that will help you to remain cool. Wear a bra that fits well and gives lots of support to protect your breasts.

### **Listen to your body**

Do not force yourself to exercise if you do not feel like it or are too tired on a particular day.

Expect a decline in overall activity and fitness level as your pregnancy progresses. This is normal as the physical demands of pregnancy increases. Pay attention to your body while exercising.

Be aware of the warning signs (see below), stop exercising and see your obstetrician if you notice any of these symptoms.

### Warning signs:

- Vaginal bleeding
- Decreased fetal movements
- Fluid leaking from the vagina
- Painful womb contractions
- Chest pain
- Dizziness or feeling faint
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Calf pain or swelling
- Excessive fatigue

### **After the baby is born**

Regular exercise after childbirth benefits new mothers as it promotes the postpartum recovery process, and the return to pre-pregnancy weight and fitness level. It also increases your energy to cope with the demands of motherhood and reduces stress and depression.

If your pregnancy and delivery was uncomplicated, you may begin a light exercise program after six weeks.

However, if your delivery was complicated or if you had a cesarean delivery, consult your obstetrician before resuming physical activity. Gradually return to more vigorous activities or your pre-pregnancy exercise levels when you feel stronger.

Try to exercise after breastfeeding when your breasts are less full and heavy.

### **Abdominal exercise after delivery**

Abdominal exercise can be performed safely after delivery to reduce back pain. Abdominal muscles are usually split in the middle by the growing belly.

If you had a Cesarean section, they will be split during the surgery as well. It is important that they are healed before you progress to more demanding abdominal exercises such as sit ups and crunches.

Meanwhile you can try this simple exercise to tone your tummy after delivery.

- Breathe out and draw your belly button back towards your spine.
- Hold this position and breathe lightly. Count to 10.
- Relax and repeat up to 10 times (one set).
- Do as many sets per day as possible.
- You can perform this exercise sitting, standing or on your hands and knees.

### Did you know?

- Small baby kicks may be felt by the mother after 18 weeks gestation.
- At 20 weeks gestation, baby weighs about 300 grams and is about 16cm long.
- Baby also starts to develop sleep wake patterns similar to that of a newborn.
- A layer of white creamy vernix coats your baby's body, protecting your baby's body, protecting your baby's skin from the long months of submersion in amniotic fluid.

### Explore more

- Being fit when pregnant
- Exercise to strengthen your core muscles
- Exercising safely in your first trimester - 5 questions answered
- Exercising safely in trimester 2
- Third trimester workout tips

- Time to exercise: ankle pumps
- Time to exercise: bridging
- Time to exercise: calf stretch in sitting
- Time to exercise: gym ball leg raises
- Time to exercise: half squat
- Time to exercise: hand squeeze
- Time to exercise: pelvic rocking
- Time to exercise: side-lying clams
- Time to exercise: walk on the spot
- Time to exercise: wrist extension stretch

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Sources:

The New Art and Science of Pregnancy and Childbirth , World Scientific 2008.