



EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY

Healthwise Global has prepared the following information to aid you and your new bundle of joy and ensure the entire family is as healthy as possible.

Good luck from the Healthwise Team and be sure to contact your Healthwise Global representative for any information or ideas.

Doing regular physical activity has health benefits during pregnancy and also helps to prepare the body for childbirth.

However, it is important to modify or choose a suitable exercise program because pregnancy affects the body's response to exercise.

Be sensible about the level of exercise that you do. Consult a doctor, physiotherapist or healthcare professional to make sure the exercise routine is not harmful for you or your baby.

If the pregnancy is complicated (such as expecting multiples, high blood pressure, heart disease, pre-eclampsia, or risk of premature births) it is best to talk to a doctor.

EXERCISE TIPS

Don't exhaust yourself - a light to moderate exercise program should be the aim. You may need to slow down as your pregnancy progresses. If in doubt, consult your maternity team. As a general rule, a light to moderate level should allow you to hold a conversation as you exercise when pregnant. If you become breathless as you talk, then you're probably exercising too strenuously.

If you weren't active before you got pregnant, don't suddenly take up strenuous exercise. If you start an aerobic exercise program, tell the instructor that you're pregnant and build up, with no more than 15 minutes of continuous exercise, 3 times a week. Increase this gradually up to 5 30-minute sessions a week.

Remember, exercise doesn't have to be strenuous to be beneficial.

EXERCISE BEFORE AND AFTER PREGNANCY

During pregnancy

- Take the stairs instead of the lift - 5 minutes.
- Walk to work or the bus stop - 10 minutes.
- Leave the car at home and walk instead if you need to make small trips - 10 minutes.

When you have a new baby

- Put baby in the pram or pouch and walk, instead of driving to your destination - 10 minutes.
- Make your chores work for you. Wash the car or mow the lawns while your partner cooks dinner and looks after the baby; or vacuum vigorously with baby in a pouch - 30 minutes.
- Do star jumps, sit-ups and stretches next to your baby while he or she has tummy time - 10 minutes.



TOP 5 WAYS TO STAY MOTIVATED

- Use a smart phone app or a pedometer and aim to get a certain number of steps in every day: 7500-9999 is considered somewhat active, > 10,000 is the recommended moderate level for an adult, > 12,500 is considered to be highly active.
- Ask a friend, colleague or family member to exercise regularly with you. Being motivated is easier if you have an exercise buddy.
- Find community-based activities that involve your baby i.e. mothers' walking groups or mum and bub yoga classes.
- Remind yourself that all moderate activity throughout the day adds up and gives health benefits. So, why not start right now?
- Knowing that exercise is good for your overall health and your baby's wellbeing is a big motivator for getting off the couch. Exercise during pregnancy keeps mum strong and fit for labour, and helps minimise the risk of gestational diabetes.

TIPS:

- Always warm up before exercising, and cool down afterwards.
- Try to keep active on a daily basis; 30 minutes of walking each day can be enough, but if you can't manage that, any amount is better than nothing.
- Avoid any strenuous exercise in hot or humid weather.
- Drink plenty of water and other fluids.
- If you go to exercise classes, make sure your teacher is properly qualified, and knows that you're pregnant and how many weeks pregnant you are.
- You might like to try swimming because the water will support your increased weight. Some local swimming pools provide aquanatal classes with qualified instructors.

EXERCISES TO AVOID

- Don't lie flat on your back, particularly after 16 weeks, because the weight of your bump presses on the big blood vessels and can make you feel faint and reduce blood flow to your baby.
- Don't take part in contact sports where there's a risk of being hit, such as martial arts, squash, tennis, football or rugby.
- Don't take part in horse riding, downhill skiing, ice hockey, gymnastics and cycling, because there's a risk of falling.
- Don't go scuba-diving, because the baby has no protection against decompression sickness and gas embolism (gas bubbles in the bloodstream).
- Don't exercise at heights over 2,500m above sea level until you have acclimatised. This is because you and your baby are at risk of altitude sickness (a decrease in oxygen).

EXERCISES FOR A FITTER PREGNANCY

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Stomach-strengthening exercises

As your baby gets bigger, you may find that the hollow in your lower back increases and this can give you backache. These exercises strengthen stomach (abdominal) muscles and ease backache, which can be a problem in pregnancy:

- Start in a table top position (on all fours) with knees under hips, hands under shoulders, with fingers facing forward and abdominals lifted to keep your back straight.



- Pull in your stomach muscles and raise your back up towards the ceiling, curling the trunk and allowing your head to relax gently forward. Don't let your elbows lock.
- Hold for a few seconds then slowly return to the box position.
- Take care not to hollow your back; it should always return to a straight/neutral position. Do this slowly and rhythmically 10 times, making your muscles work hard and moving your back carefully.
- Only move your back as far as you can comfortably.

Pelvic tilt exercises

- Stand with your shoulders and bottom against a wall.
- Keep your knees soft.
- Pull your tummy button towards your spine, so that your back flattens against the wall; hold for four seconds and release.
- Repeat up to 10 times.

Pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor exercises help to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor, which come under great strain in pregnancy and childbirth. The pelvic floor consists of layers of muscles that stretch like a supportive hammock from the pubic bone (in front) to the end of the backbone. They hold your bladder, uterus and bowel in place.

These muscles are often weakened due to childbirth, injury, surgery, lack of exercise and menopause. If the muscles start to sag, you may be more likely to have a prolapse of your uterus.

To keep these muscles working well, make pelvic floor exercises part of your routine for the rest of your life. You can start during pregnancy and continue after birth.

- Sit and lean slightly forward with a straight back.
- Squeeze and lift the muscles as if you are trying to stop yourself going to the toilet.
- Hold the squeeze as you count to 8; relax for 8 seconds. If you can't hold for 8, just hold as long as you can.
- Repeat as many as you can, about 8 to 12 squeezes. Repeat the whole thing 3 times.
- Keep breathing while exercising. Try not to tighten your buttocks.

HOW CAN I REMEMBER TO DO MY PELVIC FLOOR SQUEEZES?

It's easier to remember if you do them at the same time as you do something else. Pick something from this list. Each time you do it, do a set of squeezes too:

- after going to the toilet
- washing your hands
- having a drink
- feeding the baby
- standing in line at the supermarket checkout.

STRESS AND RELAXATION DURING PREGNANCY

We all know just how much stress can affect the mind and body. In pregnancy, stress can place a huge toll on an already overworked body, resulting in sleepless nights, loss of appetite or binge eating and emotional highs and lows, all of which can have a detrimental affect on your well-being and in some cases, your baby too. It's a good idea to learn ways to handle or banish stress as early as possible in your pregnancy.

PREGNANCY RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

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Relaxation and breathing

If you practice relaxation techniques regularly, you will find they help your well-being and reduce your stress levels dramatically, both during pregnancy and in those tiring first few months as a new parent. Breathing awareness will also help you to get through the different stages of labour. Most pregnancy books offer simple relaxation routines or speak to your doctor or midwife about what might work for you. Pre-natal yoga classes are also another great place to learn relaxation techniques. Be sure to rest as much as you can throughout your pregnancy and importantly, when your body tells you too.



Massage

Treating yourself to a regular, relaxing massage might be just the key to reducing your stress levels during pregnancy. As well as helping with those aches and pains you may be experiencing, it will ease tension and help circulation throughout your body. Always make sure your therapist is fully qualified and familiar with treating pregnant women. Certain essential oils should not be used during pregnancy and massage of the abdomen is not recommended. If you're visiting a day spa, be sure to stay away from saunas and hot tubs, they shouldn't be used in pregnancy either.

Yoga

Yoga during pregnancy can be fantastic for relaxing your mind and body. It focuses on breathing, relaxation, posture and body awareness and will keep you looking fit and healthy as well as teach you useful breathing techniques to use during labour. Be sure to enrol in a pre-natal yoga class (some yoga techniques are not safe during pregnancy) and let the teacher know of any conditions (such as high-blood pressure or previous injuries) that you may have.

OTHER WAYS TO HELP ALLEVIATE STRESS

Exercise

Just as in a non-pregnant state, exercise is vital for your well-being, both mentally and physically. Unless your carer has advised otherwise, gentle non-impact exercise such as swimming and walking are great for you. Don't exercise too close to bed-time if you have trouble sleeping though.

A basic stretch routine designed for pregnancy is also important for reducing aches, pains and tension. Many maternity hospitals offer pre-natal exercise classes or may be able to recommend an appropriate course for you.

Sleep

Unfortunately, as pregnancy progresses, not sleeping well can become an issue for some women and being stressed will only exacerbate the situation. If insomnia's getting you down, try getting some gentle light exercise in the day. Avoid daytime naps – have rest breaks instead and don't eat too close to bedtime. Develop a relaxing night time routine and stick to it (this might include reading or listening to relaxing music before bed, having a bath or doing some yoga or relaxation

techniques). Be sure to clear your mind of all thoughts (as best you can) before hitting the pillow.

Nutrition

Eating well can have a huge impact on your wellbeing during pregnancy. While it's okay to splurge and eat the occasional naughty treat, it's best to eat a well-balanced diet daily. Not only will this benefit your growing baby, it will increase the chance of you having a safe, healthy and comfortable pregnancy. Good nutrition can also help to moderate mood swings and stress levels.

Getting prepared

One of the biggest stresses for pregnant women (and partners too) is the unknown – what will the birth and parenthood be like? Nothing can compare to going through the experience yourself but you can prepare by reading as much as possible, taking part in pre-natal parenting classes and talking to friends who have gone through it too.

Before the arrival of the baby discuss issues like family finances, child-care choices and responsibilities for household tasks once baby arrives.

Sometimes being organised in advance can help to alleviate any anxiety you might be feeling about your baby's impending birth.

Ask for help

If none of these techniques are working for you, don't be afraid to ask for help. Your practitioner will be able to refer you to a specialist who will help to get your situation under control. Talk to friends and family and of course, your partner too. It might help to keep a journal of all your thoughts and feelings. Putting them down on paper may assist in getting them out of your system. Lastly, avoid stressful situations and people where you can.