

## Exercise and Pregnancy



Physical activity is an important part of a healthy pregnancy. The types of physical activities suitable during pregnancy are specific to each person. The activity should be dependant on current health conditions and fitness level.

The following information should not take the place of recommendations by your health care provider. Check with your health care provider to find out what activities are safe for you.

### Physical activity during pregnancy can benefit you in many ways:

- ❖ It can help you and your baby gain the right amount of weight.
- ❖ It can reduce backaches, joint and hip pain, leg cramps, constipation, bloating, and swelling.
- ❖ It can help you increase self-esteem, improve mood, and feel more energetic.
- ❖ It can help your muscles become stronger and improve your blood flow.
- ❖ It can help you sleep better.
- ❖ It can help you recover from the delivery.
- ❖ It can help you return to a healthy weight more quickly.

Most women should aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week.

Moderate activity can be defined as an activity that makes you breathe harder.

The activity should not overheat or overwork you.

### Here are a few general safety precautions that should be followed when participating in physical activity during pregnancy:

- ❖ Choose activities that have a reduced risk of injury for you and your baby. Some examples include walking, water aerobics or swimming, yoga, and riding a stationary bike.
- ❖ Do not exercise to the point of exhaustion or overheating.
- ❖ Drink plenty of water before, during, and after your exercise session.
- ❖ Your clothing should be comfortable and should protect and support your breasts.



### Stop exercising if you experience any of these warning signs:

*Tiredness or fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, back pain, swelling, numbness, nausea, rapid or uneven heart rate*

The primary concern when choosing a physical activity during pregnancy is the health of you and your baby. Changes that take place in your body, such as loosening of the joints, can make you more at risk for injury. Overheating and physical contact can also put you and your baby at risk. Talk with your health care provider about activities you should avoid.

**Here are a few activities your health care provider might tell you to avoid during your pregnancy:**

- ❖ Outside activities in hot weather.
- ❖ Steam rooms, hot tubs, and saunas.
- ❖ Activities that require you to lie flat on your back after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Examples include some yoga poses or some strength training exercises.
- ❖ Activities that involve a lot of contact, such as boxing, football, or horseback riding.
- ❖ Activities that require jumping or quick changes in direction. Examples include sports such as basketball or tennis.

Although there are precautions to take, there are many activities you can do that can safely help you gain the benefits of exercising during pregnancy. With the help of your health care provider, you can develop a plan that meets your specific needs.

**Below are some activities you might enjoy:**

- ❖ Walk in a safe neighborhood or through a shopping mall.
- ❖ Take advantage of prenatal exercise classes or water aerobics in your community. If the program is not specifically designed for pregnant women, be sure to inform your instructor that you are pregnant.
- ❖ Rent or buy exercise videos designed for pregnancy. These can be found at department stores, doctor's offices, hospitals, and libraries.
- ❖ Sign up for a session with a personal trainer at your local gym who has experience in working with women during pregnancy.

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**Sources:**

United States National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney  
Diseases of the National Institutes of Health – *Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan, Fit for Two: Tips for Pregnancy* available online at <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/fit4two/fitfortwo.htm#avoidactive>

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