

EXERCISE

During Pregnancy

by Stephanie F. Deivert, RD, LDN

Exercise and taking care of yourself become much more important during pregnancy, because now it is not just YOU anymore.

So you're pregnant, you're gaining weight, you feel tired and certainly not your best. With all of this, how and why exercise?

The little one growing inside of you is relying on you to take the best care of yourself and provide the healthiest environment for them to develop. Regular exercise builds bones and muscles and gives you more energy and endurance.

When you are pregnant, you may be plagued with backaches, constipation, swelling and bloating, all of which exercise helps. It can help prevent dangerous excessive weight gain during pregnancy, as well as gestational diabetes. If nothing else, it makes you feel like you can get through the day, improving your mood and helping you sleep better.

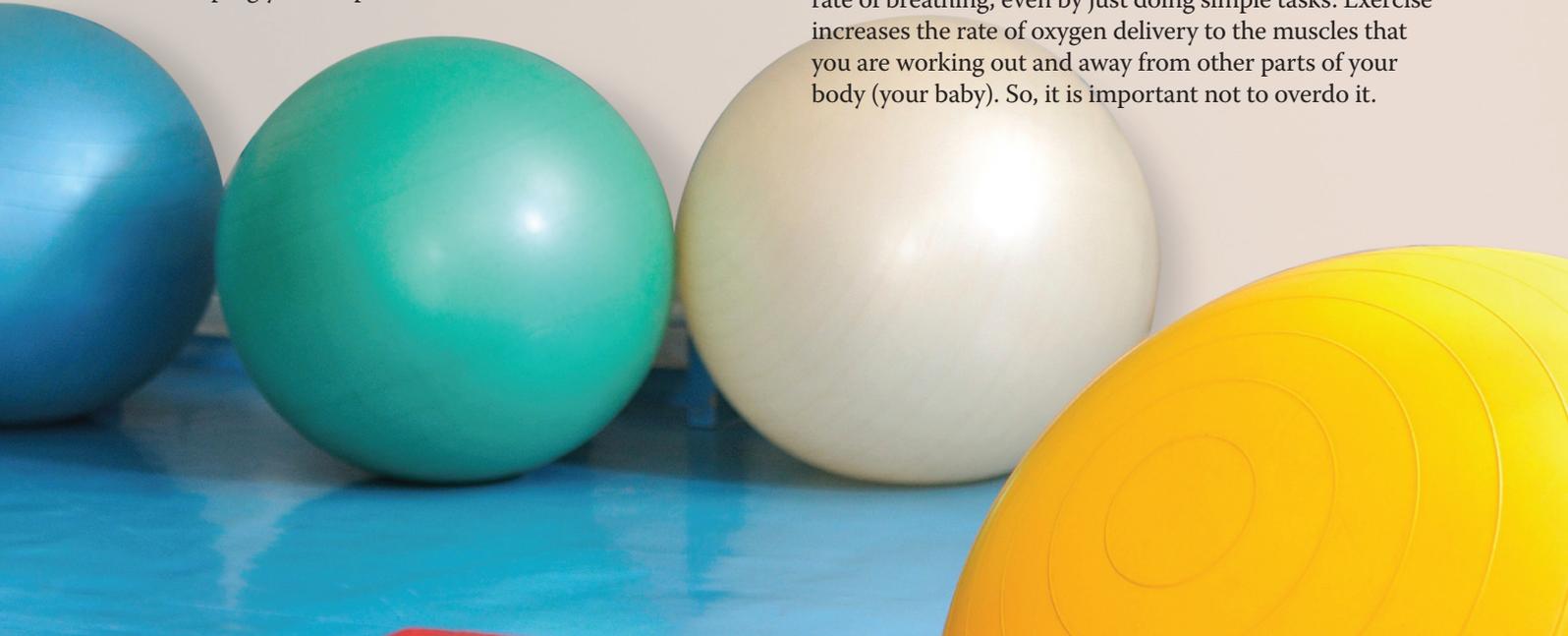
Things to Consider When Exercising While Pregnant

Some things to take into consideration about your body while you are pregnant when considering exercise are:

- **Your balance**
- **Your joints**
- **Your heart rate**
- **Your rate of breathing**

Remember that during pregnancy you may be carrying an extra 15-40 pounds (in a relatively short period of time, usually centered in your front); this can make you less stable and more likely to lose your balance, especially later in pregnancy. Also, hormones produced during pregnancy cause stretching of ligaments that support your joints, which could put you at a higher risk for injury.

You will also notice that the further along you are, your body will need to work harder just to carry your extra weight. You will notice an increase in your heart rate and rate of breathing, even by just doing simple tasks. Exercise increases the rate of oxygen delivery to the muscles that you are working out and away from other parts of your body (your baby). So, it is important not to overdo it.



How much exercise is needed during pregnancy? The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology recommends 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise per-day on most, if not all, days of the week, unless you have a medical or pregnancy complication.

Tips for Safety:

- Before exercise, talk to your doctor about your exercise plans. Your healthcare provider will be able to give you individualized recommendations based on your medical history.
- Exercise at a pace where you can talk comfortably, never to the point of breathlessness or exhaustion.
- Try not to let your heart rate go above 140 beats per minute.
- Avoid bouncy, high impact or jerky motions.
- Listen to your body – take frequent breaks and drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid exercise in extremely hot or cold weather.
- Wear comfortable footwear with strong ankle and arch support.
- Avoid rocky terrain, and slippery or unstable ground.
- Avoid contact sports or sports that may cause trauma (skiing, horseback riding) while pregnant.
- Avoid standing still for long periods of time.
- During the second and third trimester, avoid exercises that involve lying flat on your back – this decreases blood flow to your womb.
- Include warm-up and cool downs, including stretching with your workouts. Aim for about 10-15 minutes for each warm-up and cool down.

Choosing what type of exercise you do depends on your baseline level of activity. Most types of exercise are safe during pregnancy. If you have not exercised regularly prior to becoming pregnant, you can still start a regular routine; it would just be a good idea to



start slowly. Try starting with just five minutes of exercise every day, then try adding five minutes every week until you are up to 30 minutes per-day on most days of the week.

Exercise Ideas for Everyone



Walking – brisk walking gives your total body a workout and is easy on your muscles and joints. Walking is considered a safe form of exercise to initiate during pregnancy.

Swimming – swimming works out your body and uses the water as resistance for toning up your muscles. It prevents swelling (as some may get with walking or upright exercises) and it also helps you stay cool in warm weather.



Aerobics or Pilates – they have classes or videos especially designed for pregnant women. Other options would include water aerobics or low-impact aerobics.

Cycling – preferably use stationary or recumbent positions with your growing belly and precious cargo. You will certainly get an excellent aerobic and strength workout with cycling.



Yoga – they have prenatal yoga videos and classes. The stretching, strength and breathing exercises help to prepare you for giving birth and teach you to calm and center yourself.



Ball Exercises – these exercises will help you build your core strength, you just need a stability ball (55-75 cm depending on height). You can start during your first trimester and do them as many days as you would like. Even just balancing and sitting on the stability ball will help build core strength.

Dancing – some forms of dancing could be a safe and fun way to get some exercise during early pregnancy. Some women take salsa or jazz dance lessons for exercise. However, as your belly grows, you want to be cautious of your increasing lack of balance and also want to avoid jerky and bouncy movements.

If you exercised on a regular basis prior to becoming pregnant, most doctors will tell you it is okay to continue with that form of exercise during pregnancy. You just need to listen to your body and modify your routine as necessary. Remember, if you feel like you are not getting enough oxygen, your baby is feeling the same way.

Exercises Continued from Pre-pregnancy Routines

Running – if you were a runner before you became pregnant, it is okay to continue running.



Choosing what type of exercise you do depends on your baseline level of activity. Most types of exercise are safe during pregnancy. If you have not exercised regularly prior to becoming pregnant, you can still start a regular routine; it would just be a good idea to start slowly.

Elliptical or Ski Trainers – this is another great way to get a cardio and strength workout.

Strength Training –

this helps to increase your muscle tone, and may even help decrease or prevent some aches and pains that are common during pregnancy. Remember, during pregnancy it is a good idea to do less weight and more repetitions.



Exercises to Help Prepare for Labor

(Start these early in your third trimester to help strengthen your muscles for delivery.)

Kegel Exercises – these exercises strengthen the pelvic floor. You should do these daily, multiple times per day, to help prevent urinary incontinence, decreasing risk of hemorrhoids and speeding the healing after an episiotomy or tear, should you have one during childbirth.

Some evidence suggests that a strong pelvic floor may shorten the pushing stage of labor. Repeatedly contract (for a count of four) and then relax your pelvic-floor muscles as though you're stopping and starting the flow of urine. DO NOT actually do it while you are urinating.

Pelvic Tilts – this variation of the pelvic tilt, done on all fours, strengthens the abdominal muscles and eases back pain during pregnancy and labor. Get down on your hands and knees and as you breathe in, tighten your abdominal muscles and tuck your buttocks under and round your back (like a cat arching its back). Relax your back into a neutral position as you breathe out.

Squats – squatting helps to prepare for giving birth. This exercise strengthens your thighs and helps open your pelvis. Stand (you could hold something for balance) with your feet slightly more than hip-width apart, toes pointed outward. Contract your abdominal muscles, lift your chest and relax your shoulders. Then lower your tailbone toward the floor as though you were sitting down on a chair. Take a deep breath in and then exhale, pushing into your legs to rise to a standing position.

Tailor Pose – This position can help open your pelvis and loosen your hip joints in preparation for birth. It can also improve your posture and ease tension in your lower back. Sit up straight against a wall with the soles of your feet touching each other (sit on a folded towel or chair cushion if that's more comfortable for you). Gently press your knees down and away from each other, but do not force them. Stay in this position for as long as you're comfortable. You can even sit watching TV this way.

Exercise Because it's Important

Whether you were inactive when it came to exercise or a marathon runner, light to moderate exercise during pregnancy is important and helpful to keep you and your baby healthy and to build stamina for labor and delivery. Just remember not to overdo it, listen to your body and pick something that is fun and relaxing for you and your baby.



About the Author:

Stephanie F. Deivert, RD, LDN, has been with the Center for Nutrition and Weight Management at Geisinger Health System since 2002. She completed her Bachelor's in Nutritional Sciences and Exercise Physiology at Penn State University in 2002 and her Dietetic Internship at Geisinger Medical Center in 2004.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

info@obesityaction.org

(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838



@ObesityActionCoalition

@ObesityAction