

# Exercising in pregnancy

## How to get started

Regular cardiovascular exercise can help you stay fit and healthy during pregnancy and prepare you for labour. It helps you maintain a healthy weight, eases and prevents back pain, and reduces your risk of gestational diabetes and pregnancy-related high blood pressure. Exercise also helps reduce insomnia, fatigue, stress, anxiety and depression.

If you have never exercised regularly before, you can safely begin an exercise plan during pregnancy after consulting your doctor, midwife or specialist antenatal or postnatal exercise professional. Walking is considered safe to initiate when pregnant. Avoid starting any exercise that you haven't done before; alternatively, keep up your usual daily exercise for as long as is comfortable. If you're unsure about an activity, check with your doctor or midwife.

If you have asthma, heart disease, diabetes or a pregnancy-related health condition (such as bleeding or spotting, low placenta, threatened or recurrent miscarriage, previous premature births or a history of early labour or a weak cervix), speak to your doctor or midwife before exercising.

Regular exercise postpartum significantly reduces postnatal depression. However, wait until after your six-week postnatal check and/or safety advice on physical activity from your doctor or midwife before you resume your exercise plan.

**Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.**

## Warm up and cool down

**Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely.** Warm-up exercises include simple stretches, range-of-motion activities and beginning the activity at a low intensity. They can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

**Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool down to ensure your heart rate and breathing return to normal safely.** Cool-down exercises include simple stretches and slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity. You should feel relaxed but energised after exercise!

## The exercises!

### Cardiovascular/stamina exercises—get your heart rate up!

<b>How often:</b>	Aim for at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, or 150 minutes a week in total. If you are new to exercise, start with 3 days a week and add additional sessions as your stamina increases.
<b>How hard:</b>	Moderate intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. A reasonable aerobic goal is maintaining a good fitness level throughout pregnancy without trying to reach peak fitness.
<b>How long:</b>	Aim for 30 minutes. If you haven't exercised before, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for 30 minutes.
<b>Type:</b>	Try brisk walking, Nordic walking, jogging, cycling, or low-impact aerobics, dance and swimming instructed by a certified antenatal exercise professional (particularly helpful for pelvic or back problems). Avoid the activities listed in the 'Exercise Safety' section.

### What will it do for me?

*Regular exercise will reduce fatigue, your risk of leg swelling and varicose veins, and help you maintain a healthy weight.*

### Strength exercises—use your muscles!

<b>How often:</b>	Aim for once or twice a week. Ask for advice on the best exercises for you.
<b>How hard:</b>	Start with light weights or resistance exercises.
<b>How many:</b>	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body, and repeat each exercise 10–15 times in the first trimester and 15–20 times in the second and third trimester. Aim for 1–3 sets of each exercise.
<b>Type:</b>	Try strength exercises for the pelvic floor, back and core. For safety, pelvic tilts and crunches can be done sitting in a chair or standing against a wall. Strength exercises for the abdomen should only be done sitting, lying on your side or standing <i>after</i> the sixteenth week of pregnancy. Wind down your strength training towards the end of your pregnancy. Avoid heavy weights.

### What will it do for me?

*Strength training helps maintain bone, muscle and joint health.*

### Flexibility exercises—stretch!

<b>How often:</b>	Aim to exercise 2–3 times a week.
<b>How many:</b>	Try 8–10 gentle stretch exercises using the upper and lower body.
<b>How long:</b>	Hold each stretch for 10 seconds.
<b>Type:</b>	Consider professionally designed antenatal Tai Chi, yoga, Pilates, aqua aerobics or home stretching exercises. Joint ligaments stretch more easily during and after pregnancy: avoid overstretching and ask a certified antenatal or postnatal professional for demonstrations and advise on how to exercise safely.

### What will it do for me?

*Regular stretch exercises promote and maintain bone, muscle and joint health.*

### Balance exercises—move with confidence!

<b>How often:</b>	Aim for 2–3 times a week.
<b>How many:</b>	Choose 2–3 balance exercises, and repeat each exercise 10–15 times.
<b>How long:</b>	Hold each balance for 10 seconds.
<b>Type:</b>	Try specifically designed antenatal yoga, Tai Chi or home balance exercises. Use a wall, sturdy chair or stability ball, if necessary.

### What will it do for me?

*Practising balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to impending balance loss, thereby reducing the risk of falls, fractures and injuries. They also improve your posture and help you adjust to changes in your balance as a result of pregnancy.*

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## Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer!

## Exercise safety

### Avoid the following:

- Exercising on your back after the first trimester (because of reduced blood flow to the uterus)
- Holding your breath while exercising
- Exercises where falling is likely, balance exercises alone or in a cluttered environment, and/or contact/collision sports
- Activities that involve jarring or rapid motion changes and prolonged jumping, hopping, skipping, bouncing or running
- Exercising in extreme temperatures or conditions
- Lifting heavy weights.

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell and always follow your pregnancy management plan.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Ask for assistance if you are unsure about any exercises.

SAMPLE CHAPTER ONLY