



PREGNANCY AND EXERCISE

The benefits of exercise, good nutrition, and the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle are undisputed as ways to reduce many of the diseases that affect women such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis, and obesity. In pregnancy, the benefits of exercise are also known. Regular exercise during pregnancy is beneficial in keeping weight gain under control, reducing stress, and reducing the length of labor. Some studies even show that patients who exercise regularly during pregnancy can reduce their risk of requiring a cesarean section. We also know that regular exercise does not increase your chances of miscarriage or pregnancy loss.

CHANGES IN YOUR BODY DURING PREGNANCY

- Increased rate of respirations.
- Because of a hormone called Relaxin, the joints loosen in pregnancy, especially in the pelvis. As a result, you may be more prone to joint strains or sprains.
- The curvature in your lower back increases, which, along with the enlargement in the uterus and baby, causes a shift in your center of gravity.
- Your heart rate will increase about 10 to 15 beats per minute.
- Your metabolism increases.

GUIDELINES FOR EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY

- Weight gain in pregnancy should be about 20 to 25 pounds. Depending on your level of exercise, the number of calories you consume will have to be increased in order to achieve this amount of weight gain.
- You should avoid exercises or sports that could result in trauma. For example, water or snow skiing, surfing, mountain climbing, scuba diving, etc.
- Remember that your body shape changes, which results in a change in your balance. This is most prominent in the final trimester. These body changes may not be fully back to normal for up to 6 weeks after delivery. Therefore, you should avoid sports or activities that require a lot of balance, such as roller blading, etc.
- Do not exercise on your back during the last two trimesters of pregnancy. The weight of the uterus causes pressure on the large blood vessels of the abdomen that results in reduced return of blood back to the heart. Thus, exercising in this position could cause dizziness and reduced blood flow to your baby.
- Never exercise to the point of complete exhaustion. You should stop exercising when you feel tired or begin to feel short of breath.
- Always warm-up with stretching exercises before you begin your exercise routine, and always allow yourself at least five minutes of cool-down exercises.
- Drink plenty of water before and after exercise.
- If you are not currently exercising, begin slowly and build up gradually. If you have a regular exercise program, you should be able to continue that program.

- Your exercise program should be accompanied with a healthy diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- If you develop lower back pain or hip-type pain as your pregnancy progresses, switch to a non-weight bearing type exercise such as swimming.

No matter what type of exercise program you use, discuss your plan with your doctor. If you develop any complications of pregnancy, such as high blood pressure, premature labor, bleeding, premature rupture of the membranes, etc. stop exercising until you discuss your exercise plans with your doctor.

Q. WHAT IS THE BEST EXERCISE FOR ME?

A. Your current level of training, your weight, and your current level of fitness all affect the type of exercise program that is best for you. If you are currently involved in an exercise program or aerobic class, you will generally be able to continue this program. On the other hand, if you are not exercising on a regular basis, you should begin by taking a daily walk. This walk should be at a brisk pace. As you feel more comfortable, you should increase the length of your walk at a rate of about 10% to 15% per week. Above all, you should listen to your body, do not overdue it, and do not exercise to the point of exhaustion.

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