

Pregnancy and Exercise: Tips for Working Out Safely

By Robin Resnick, Certified Personal Trainer

Congratulations! You are having a baby. And good for you that you want to exercise while you are expecting. Exercise is an important part of a healthy pregnancy. Before you begin, there are a few things you should know. Exercise during pregnancy is OK for most pregnant women. If you have a low risk pregnancy, you might be able to continue your pre-pregnancy exercise program. However, if you have certain medical conditions, your health care provider might restrict certain activities or order complete rest. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) have established guidelines and recommendations for safe exercise during pregnancy. Several organizations such as MOTHERWELL® offer prenatal fitness certifications and regularly provide their trainers with the latest guidelines and research.

Not convinced exercise and pregnancy mix? Some of the many benefits include:

- Helps reduce backaches and improves your posture
- Reduces constipation, bloating and swelling
- Gives you energy
- Improves your mood
- May help you sleep better
- Promotes muscle tone, strength and endurance
- Prepares you for the physical stress of labor and makes it easier to get back into shape after the baby is born.

Pregnancy isn't the time to try to lose weight or begin a vigorous exercise routine. If you are just beginning a fitness program, do so gradually. If you aren't in any of the high-risk categories, you can pursue a regular exercise program at a mild to moderate level, on a regular basis. Make sure you eat a well balanced diet with enough calories and drink plenty of water. This helps you to stay hydrated and to prevent overheating. Don't overexert yourself, or exercise to the point of exhaustion. And wear comfortable and supportive clothing. However, before you begin any prenatal fitness program, it is recommended that you consult with your health care provider.

Where to begin? Do you belong to a fitness center, or exercise in your home? Fitness centers, adult education departments and hospitals often have exercise classes specially designed for expectant women. Or you can hire a certified prenatal personal trainer to help guarantee you are following the guidelines for exercise during pregnancy. It is generally OK to go to classes that are for everyone, or workout with a trainer, just avoid risky and contraindicated exercises. If you experience any of the systems that are contraindicated, then stop!

Throughout your pregnancy, your center of balance will change, and you should avoid activities that rely on your balance for safety, such as skiing. Some exercises will be difficult to do and others, e.g. lying on your back, should be avoided. If you work with a certified prenatal personal trainer, they will design a program based on your needs, follow the ACOG guidelines, and ensure you are doing the exercises correctly.

Just remember, get the go ahead from your health care provider and exercise with care. OK, let's exercise!

Contraindicated Conditions for Exercising During Pregnancy

Exercising during pregnancy should always be done with extra caution. If any of the following signs or symptoms occur, exercise should be stopped and a physician consulted immediately:

- Pain (especially in the back, hip, abdominal or pelvic regions)
- Vaginal bleeding
- Contractions
- Unusual absence of fetal movements
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling faint
- Heart palpitations or an excessively rapid heartbeat
- Nausea
- Numbness
- Difficulty walking
- Excessive fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Marked increased swelling in your hands, feet, and ankles

June/July 2003

Boston Women's Journal