



# Exercise while pregnant

What kinds of exercise can you do during pregnancy? Ask your health care provider before you start. Talk to him or her during your whole pregnancy, too. Let him or her know what exercises you do.



## YOU MAY NEED TO GO EASY

Your provider may put a limit on exercise and other physical activities if you have:

- A history of preterm labor
- A history of 3 or more miscarriages
- A cervix that doesn't work the way it should
- Heart disease or high blood pressure
- Placenta previa

## EXERCISE BENEFITS

Most women can and do exercise during pregnancy. In fact, they should! Regular exercise can:

- Help you keep fit during pregnancy
- Relax your muscles and your mind
- Help with backaches
- Help with constipation
- Lower the chance for getting varicose veins and hemorrhoids
- Give you a sense of well-being
- Help you sleep better
- Keep your blood flowing well. This keeps your legs from swelling.

- Make delivery a little quicker and easier
- Leave you more fit after delivery

You can usually do the same forms of exercise you did before pregnancy. But you need to do them safely. Don't go to extremes. Don't overwork your heart. If you do, you could get short of breath or sick to your stomach. You could get dizzy or faint. Check your pulse when you exercise. Ask your health care provider how many beats per minute not to go over. In general, heart rate should not go over 140 beats per minute in pregnancy.



## WHAT TO AVOID

These are things you should not do:

- Any sport or activity with a risk of blows to your belly. Example: contact sports
- Any sport or activity with the risk of a hard fall. Examples: horseback riding, water skiing
- High-impact aerobics or any exercises that make you bounce or jerk a lot.
- Scuba diving, water skiing, and surfing
- After 20 weeks of pregnancy, exercises that have you lie on your back on the floor.
- Deep knee bends, full sit-ups, and straight-leg toe touches. Also, don't do double leg raises in which you raise and lower both legs at the same time.

## SAFE EXERCISES

These forms of exercise are usually safe:

- Walking
- Low-impact aerobic exercises
- Swimming and water exercises
- Riding an exercise bike (the kind that doesn't move)
- Golf
- Yoga
- Stretching exercises
- Exercises for strength
- Pelvic toning, such as Kegel exercises. These are exercises you do to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor. Ask your health care provider for materials showing the ones the provider wants you to do.
- Breathing and relaxation exercises

## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU EXERCISE

- If you are new to exercise:
  - Start slowly. Do 10 minutes of warmups.
  - Do 5 minutes of more active exercise.
  - Do 5 minutes of cooling down.
  - If you get tired during the more active exercise, stop right away.
  - In a few days, if you feel up to it, add a couple of minutes to the active exercise each day. Don't go over 15 minutes of active exercise, though.
- If you were active before pregnancy:
  - You can probably go on with the same exercise routine.
  - Check with your health care provider, though.
- Always warm up and cool down. This reduces risk of injury.
- Try to exercise 3 to 4 times a week. Do warmups and gentle exercises at the very least.
- Relax after you exercise. Lie down on your left side. This aids blood circulation.
- Eat an extra 50 to 100 calories for every 15 minutes of active exercise. Choose healthy foods for these extra calories.



## EXERCISE CAUTIONS

- Don't get overheated or dehydrated (that's when your body doesn't have enough water).
    - Don't exercise in hot weather.
    - Don't use saunas, steam rooms, or hot tubs. These things raise your body temperature enough to be able to cause harm to the fetus in the 1st trimester.
    - Drink an extra 4 to 8 ounces of water for every 15 minutes of active exercise. Drink more in warm weather, or if you sweat a lot.
  - Be very careful. Your center of gravity shifts forward as your body changes. Falls become more likely.
    - Wear comfy clothes that move with you.
    - Wear the right athletic shoes for the activity.
    - Use the right surfaces.
      - Indoors, use only wood floors or tightly carpeted areas. Stay away from tile or concrete floors. Don't exercise without shoes.
      - Outdoors, use only soft running tracks, smooth grass, or dirt trails. Stay away from hard roads, sidewalks, or uneven surfaces.
  - Don't overdo it. That's not good for the baby. Even trained athletes are advised not to exercise to extremes.
    - If it feels good, it's probably fine. There should be no pain.
    - Check your pulse 5 minutes after your workout. Is it over 100 beats per minute? If so, you've likely done too much. At the end of your workout you should feel new energy, not ready to fall over.
  - During the last trimester, slow down.
  - Then, during month 9, stretch and walk only. These forms of exercise are just right for you now.
- Stop exercising right away if:**
- You feel pain of any kind.
  - You have a cramp.
  - You have palpitations. These are strong, rapid heartbeats.
  - You can hardly breathe.
  - You lose control of your muscles.
  - You have a hard time walking.
  - You get a headache.
  - Your face, ankles, hands, or feet swell up.
  - You feel lightheaded or dizzy.
  - You have leakage of amniotic fluid. You bleed from the vagina. Call your health care provider if this happens.
  - You feel a slowing down or loss of fetal movement after the 28th week. If a short rest doesn't change this, call your health care provider.