

FitFacts®

Exercise and Pregnancy

FOR MANY MOMS-TO-BE, THE NEWS OF A PREGNANCY IS FILLED WITH EXCITEMENT, ANTICIPATION, ANXIETY AND A NEWFOUND COMMITMENT TO DO EVERYTHING RIGHT FOR THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF A HEALTHY BABY. THE QUESTION OF WHETHER TO CONTINUE OR BEGIN AN EXERCISE PROGRAM TO OPTIMIZE HEALTH FOR BOTH MOM AND BABY OFTEN ARISES.

The first step to help answer this question is a visit to your doctor. While exercise during pregnancy is usually encouraged, under some circumstances exercise can be detrimental to both the expecting mother and the growing fetus. Only after a thorough clinical evaluation can a physician determine your exercise risks, if any.

PLENTY OF BENEFITS

Exercise during pregnancy offers many physical and emotional benefits. For example, a good exercise program may help relieve common problems associated with pregnancy, such as excessive weight gain, swelling of your hands and feet, leg cramps, varicose veins, insomnia, fatigue and constipation. You also can look forward to improved posture and circulation, reduced backaches, and increased mood and energy. Plus, you'll feel better knowing you're doing something good for yourself and your baby.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that pregnant women who have been cleared to exercise by their physicians engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. Walking, swimming, cycling and moderate-intensity aerobics are highly effective and generally safe during pregnancy, even for beginners. Running, racquet sports, and strength training when done in moderation are safe for pregnant women who had been participating in these activities prior to pregnancy. While strenuous activity may be associated with intrauterine growth restriction, under physician guidance it may be safe for athletes to continue a vigorous program.

When designing your exercise program, take into account the changes you're experiencing —new body alignment, different posture, reduced strength and endurance, and extra weight (up to 25 to 40 pounds), which places stress on your joints and muscles and makes your heart work harder. The key is to let your body be your guide. You know you're at a good intensity when you can talk normally and not become exhausted too quickly.

After the first trimester, all pregnant women should avoid exercises that require them to lie on their backs in a supine position. This can cause you to feel dizzy when you stand up and it also decreases blood flow to you and your baby. Also avoid sports and activities with increased risk of trauma or falling, such as ice hockey, soccer, basketball, gymnastics, horseback riding and downhill skiing. Scuba diving can be fatal for a developing fetus.

Since you're exercising for two, you should pay close attention to signs that something is not right for either you or your baby. If you experience any of the



following symptoms, stop exercising and call your physician:

- Vaginal bleeding
- Shortness of breath before exercising
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Chest pain
- Muscle weakness
- Calf pain or swelling
- Preterm labor
- Decreased fetal movement
- Amniotic fluid leakage

LET'S GET STARTED

If you're interested in beginning a prenatal exercise program but don't know how to start, check with the fitness centers in your area, the YMCA and community hospitals. For best results, make sure that your trainer or class instructor holds a certification from an accredited organization such as the [American Council on Exercise](#) and has specialized training in prenatal fitness.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

American Council on Exercise—[Pre- and Post-Natal Fitness](#) by Lenita Anthony

[KidsHealth](#)

[American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#)

[Mayo Clinic](#)