



EXERCISE AND... PREGNANCY

WHAT IS IT?

HOW DOES IT AFFECT ME?

WHAT EFFECT WILL EXERCISE HAVE ON IT?

WHAT IS IT?

We all know what pregnancy is, but do we all know what exercises will make your pregnancy and childbirth a much smoother process?

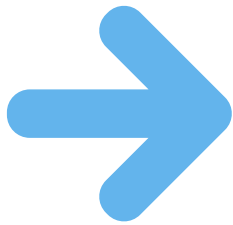
One set of exercises that all women - pregnant or not - should learn to do is pelvic floor exercises. The pelvic floor is the sling of muscles that forms the base to your pelvis. Exercising these muscles during pregnancy, and afterwards, will help tone them up, as well as make you more aware of them so you can relax them during the birth. Exercising the pelvic floor after the birth may also help ease perineal pain.

It has been found that a strong, taught pelvic floor is helpful when, during childbirth, the baby needs to engage and then go through a 90-degree turn before popping out! A sling-like, loose pelvic floor seems to give the baby less to grab hold of when performing this movement and can cause complications in delivery

Strong pelvic floor muscles also help prevent more serious problems such as stress incontinence and prolapse of the uterus, which sometimes happens in older women.

Pelvic floor exercises are for life!





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Pregnancy changes your body in many ways. Some of these changes can affect the way you exercise.

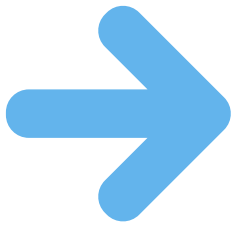
Throughout pregnancy, your body is experiencing a hormonal roller-coaster ride, where hormones like relaxin causes many of your ligaments and joints to soften and loosen in preparation for labour. Joint injuries and ligament damage may therefore result from exercise that involves jerking actions and sudden movement, for example tennis, squash and jogging. The risk of back injuries associated with weight training or rowing is also increased.

During the later months, your belly gets bigger and your balance may not be so good, so falls become more likely when you do any exercise that requires balance.

Most experts think that the following activities should be avoided during pregnancy because of the high risk of falls or direct damage to you or your baby:

- Mountaineering, rock climbing
- High diving, scuba diving
- Downhill skiing, water skiing, water slides
- Step classes, gymnastics (avoid high impact exercises!)
- Anaerobic exercise such as sprinting
- Contact sports, competitive team sports

The use of saunas, steam baths and hot tubs may also cause over-heating. There is some evidence that over-heating during pregnancy may cause damage to the baby's developing nervous system. ("Overheating" does not mean simply getting a bit hot and bothered in the summer; or enjoying a warm bath in the winter; it means getting so hot that your core temperature rises and even the amniotic fluid in which your baby floats starts heating up. This is only likely to happen if you exercise for long periods in the hot sun without rest breaks and extra fluids – or if your body cannot lose heat by sweating effectively, as in a sauna or hot tub.)



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Your baby is affected when you exercise hard during pregnancy. If you get very hot the baby can also get over-heated and this may be dangerous. As you get breathless, the baby's heart rate also gets faster.

In a healthy pregnancy the baby's heart rate will quickly return to normal when you rest. However, if there are problems with the pregnancy, it may take longer to get back to normal.

Ask your midwife, family doctor or hospital specialist about safe exercise if:

- You have high blood pressure
- You have any medical conditions such as diabetes, thyroid imbalance or heart disease
- You have had any vaginal bleeding during this pregnancy (or have had two or more miscarriages in the past)
- You have a low-lying placenta (seen on an ultrasound scan)
- Your baby is growing slowly (or previous babies have been slow growing during pregnancy)
- You are expecting more than one baby

Tell your carers what physical activity you are used to, and what you would like to do during pregnancy. Together you can assess the benefits and risks, and decide on a safe level of exercise. **Walking, stretching and gentle swimming are good exercise for almost all pregnant women.**