

Exercise During Pregnancy – Fact Sheet

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Exercise during your pregnancy can be a very beneficial experience if you are conscious of the precautions to take and knowledgeable about the effects that exercise can have on you and your developing baby. The guidelines and limitations for exercise should start as soon as you know you are pregnant, or begin trying to become pregnant. If you have any specific questions or concerns, please ask your Fitness Leader or obstetrician.

1. Understand that the limitations put on exercise frequency, intensity and time are for the benefit of the developing baby, not for the mother. Normally, the mother can handle much better than the baby.
2. Avoid overheating. Your growing baby does not have the same ability to dissipate heat you do. Consequently, if you get overheated when you exercising, the baby may be put at risk. This is especially true during the first trimester, when the most important growth, cell production and formation is occurring. To avoid overheating:
 - a) Avoid prolonged exercise. Limit the more strenuous phase of the aerobic exercise to 15 minutes or less. Give yourself breaks during the workout to rest and cool-off.
 - b) Stay well hydrated. Drink plenty of water before, during and after your workout. Take a water bottle with you, and make a deal with yourself to drink it's entire contents by the end of the workout.
 - c) Do not use sweating as an indicator of how hot you may be getting. Your core temperature may rise without any accompanying perspiration.
 - d) Avoid exercising on hot, humid days. Use fans during hot weather.
 - e) Wear light, loose-fitting clothing. Cotton is best.
 - f) Avoid saunas and steam baths at all times during pregnancy. Your core temperature may be rising without an associated feeling of being hot.
3. Avoid high intensity exercise. Studies have indicated that when the mother's heart rate stays in the range of approximately 140 bpm, the fetus has no abnormal responses. However, when maternal heart rate averaged 180 bpm, indications of fetus distress were present. This strongly suggests that high intensity exercise needs to be avoided. To keep exercise intensity at a safe level, follow these guidelines:
 - a) Change from an intermediate or advanced aerobic program to a lighter pace program. Modify the level of impact (do mainly low-impact movements) and use less vigorous arm movements. You may have to modify your program more if you are exercising in a weight-bearing mode (aerobics, jogging, using a stair-climbing machine, etc) than if you are exercising in a non-weight bearing mode (swimming, cycling). This is because your increased weight will add to the overload effect of the exercise.
 - b) Learn how to measure you heart rate, and check it regularly. For a 10-second-exercise heart rate check, should be 23 beats or less. If it is higher, lower the intensity and re-check in 5 minutes to assure that you are not working too hard.
 - c) Be realistic about the need to exercise in moderation. You do not need to keep up with non-pregnant participants or compete with what you were able to do before pregnancy.
 - d) Have a prolonged cool-down after the aerobic portion of your workout. Stopping exercise suddenly, or going directly from aerobics exercise to

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- lying on the floor can also have detrimental effects on the fetus. Gradually reduce the intensity of the aerobic phase of your workout and, after you have finish, get a drink, move around and cool off before commencing floor exercises or stretching.
4. Avoid frequent and prolonged exercise after week 28 of your pregnancy. Even with moderate exercise intensity, frequent (more than 4 times per week) exercise after week 28 has been associated with decreased birth-weight and gestation duration.
 5. An increase in your resting heart rate is a normal response to pregnancy. If your normal resting heart rate is around 70 bpm, it can go as high as 100 bpm at rest by the end of your pregnancy. This is a completely normal physiological change and should not be taken as a sign that you are becoming less fit.
 6. Limit the amount of exercise that you do lying on your back. This is of particular concern from your second trimester on. Exercising on you back (as when doing abdominal exercises) could cause a reduction of blood flow to your heart and head, causing you to feel faint and lightheaded. More importantly, the blood flow to the placenta and the baby can decrease. Limit the amount of time on your back to 2-3 minutes and if you begin to feel at all dizzy or lightheaded, turn onto your left side and rest.
 7. About 30% of pregnant women will experience a separation of the rectus abdominus during pregnancy. If this does occur abdominal exercises should cease. Even if it is not a problem, it is recommended that you support your abdominal muscle by crossing your hands over the abdominal area (bracing) when doing any crunch-type movements. Do not do full sit-ups at any time. If you continue to do crunches when pregnant, your obstetrician should regularly check the separation of your abdominal muscle. If separation or discomfort occurs, stop doing abdominal exercises. In addition, all exercises performed in the supine position should be avoided.
 8. Avoid the use if hand weights over 0.5kg in weight. Heavier weights have been shown to increase the heart rate higher than 140 bpm. New body exercise classes with no weights could be a perfect alternative to a normal aerobics class. The use of hand weights should be avoided if pins and needles are being experienced in your hands.
 9. The only form of resistance training that should be done during pregnancy is low weight, high repetition work with an emphasis on endurance rather than strength training. Avoid heavy strength training during your pregnancy.
 10. Perform Kegel exercises. These exercises are useful for strengthening the pelvic floor muscles, aiding in your recovery from labor and delivery and helping to avoid stress incontinence. While seated or lying down, pretend that you are trying to stop yourself from urinating. The small muscles you are squeezing are your pelvic floor muscles. Hold each contraction for 10-15 seconds and repeat at least 10 times. If stress incontinence is a problem for you, do this several times each day and see a qualified physiotherapist who specializes in pelvic floor conditioning.
 11. Wear a good, supportive bra. This helps to provide support for your enlarging and possibly tender breasts.
 12. Avoid rapid changes in direction. As your body shape changes, so does your center of gravity with may effect you stability, balance and coordination. Exercise classes that involve rapid directional changes, lots of turns and twists and quick move changes may put you at risk of injury. Either avoid them, or modify the exercises to make them simpler and less complicated.
 13. Be very cautious if you are doing Step exercise classes. For the same reasons as above, you may be at risk of injuring of falling when stepping. From the first trimester, lower the step height preferably working on a platform only. Do not use hand weights, do not perform propulsions, and do not participate in complicated Step classes. In the second and third trimester, or at the time that you begin to show, Step classes are not



recommended because the changes in your body may effect your balance. Step classes should be only be done by experienced pregnant exercises and if so, with extreme caution. If you have never done Step classes, do not begin them during pregnancy.

14. PUMP™ classes. These classes should approached with caution. If you have not previously participated in PUMP™ classes don't begin during pregnancy. Experienced PUMP exercisers should be very cautious as some of the exercises may cause back, knee or other joint pain.
15. Stretch gently. The hormone relaxin is increased in your body during pregnancy. This hormone causes increased joint laxity, which may make you more susceptible to injury. Be cautious and gentle with your stretching.
16. With exercise, pregnant women sometimes experience low blood sugar levels, resulting in light-headedness or faintness. A light snack approximately 2 hours before exercise should prevent this. Carry a small carton of fruit juice to your workout in case this occurs.
17. STOP EXERCISE!! If at any time during your exercise session you feel very hot, faint, dizzy, short of breath, experience vaginal bleeding, have palpitations, blurred vision, disorientation, or severe or continuous headaches, STOP IMMEDIATELY. It is also important to stop if you experience lower abdominal pain, tightness of cramping, back pain or pubic pain. If you experience any of these symptoms, consult your obstetrician.

