

Exercise

Exercise is encouraged during pregnancy as it has many benefits including preparing you for labor and childbirth. Exercise should occur at least 30 minutes a day on most if not all days. Exercise will help with some of the common discomforts of pregnancy including reducing backaches, constipation, bloating and swelling. It also improves sleep, your mood and posture. Exercise can help prevent or treat gestational diabetes. If you have any medical conditions or complications with the pregnancy, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider before exercising.

The following activities are safe during pregnancy: walking, swimming, cycling, and aerobics. Running is also safe for women who were runners prior to pregnancy. Activities that should be avoided during pregnancy include downhill skiing, contact sports, and scuba diving. Activities that increase your risk of falling should also be avoided such as gymnastics, water skiing, and horseback riding. You should avoid exercises that involve jumping, jarring motions or quick changes in direction.

You should be able to talk normally while exercising and it is important to drink lots of fluids. You should stop exercising if you have any of the following symptoms: vaginal bleeding, dizziness or feeling faint, increased shortness of breath, chest pain, headache, muscle weakness, calf pain or swelling, contractions, decreased fetal movement, or leakage of fluid from the vagina.

Exercise can be resumed postpartum when you feel ready. If you had a complicated pregnancy or delivery, you need time to recover and should check with your healthcare provider prior to resuming exercise.

Most women think of physical exertion when they think of exercise. In addition to the exercises mentioned already, women should regularly do pelvic floor exercises, known as kegels. These should be done during and after your pregnancy. Doing kegels during pregnancy has been shown to facilitate quicker recovery of postpartum muscle strength. This decreases your risk of urinary and bowel incontinence caused by stretched or injured pelvic floor muscles. Pelvic muscle strength also helps maximize effective pushing during labor. After pregnancy, doing kegels will help recover strength in the pelvic floor muscles. Strong pelvic floor muscles may also enhance sexual pleasure for you and your partner.

For further information regarding pregnancy and exercise, please see the brochure Prenatal Fitness: Exercise During Pregnancy.