

When not to exercise

If you suffer from the following complaints, it may not be appropriate to exercise during pregnancy -

- Serious heart, lung, kidney or thyroid disease
- Poorly controlled diabetes
- History of multiple miscarriage, premature labour or previous or present 'small for dates' baby
- Very high or low blood pressure
- Placenta praevia after 26 weeks
- Acute infectious disease

You will need to check with your medical carers before starting an exercise program.

The following conditions require some caution and it is advisable to seek medical advice before commencing exercise

- Asthma
- Diabetes, if well controlled
- History of miscarriage
- High blood pressure
- Early placenta praevia
- Vaginal bleeding
- Reduced baby movements
- Anaemia
- Extremely overweight or underweight
- Heavy smoking

If you experience any of the following, you should stop exercising immediately and contact your doctor

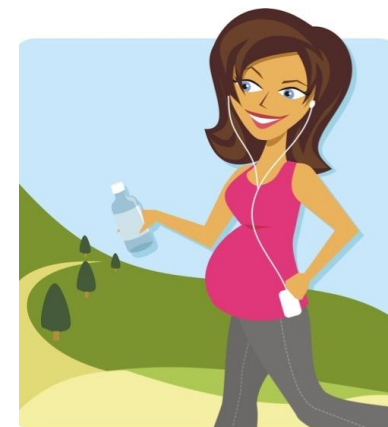
- Severe back, pelvic, abdominal or calf pain
- Vaginal bleeding
- Severe shortness of breath, dizziness or palpitations
- Difficulty in walking
- Persistent, severe headache

If you have any questions about exercise during pregnancy, please speak to your women's health physiotherapist or your named physiotherapist. C
Contact number: 020 8487 6022

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General exercise during pregnancy

Advice for Patients



Queen Mary's Hospital Roehampton

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Why exercise during pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your body goes through some dramatic changes. To help you cope with these changes, exercise is very important, providing you are healthy and your pregnancy is progressing normally. It is recommended that pregnant women do 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise on most, if not all, days of the week.

During pregnancy, you are aiming to maintain or moderately improve your level of fitness. Other benefits include

- Improved mother and baby well-being
- Improved posture, balance and co-ordination
- Keeping your weight within a healthy range
- Reduced levels of back and pelvic discomfort
- Better preparation for labour and improved pain management
- A faster recovery after birth

Types of exercise

Cardiovascular exercises

It is important during pregnancy that you maintain the fitness of your heart and lungs. Brisk walking or swimming are great ways of doing this, provided that you are exercising at mild to moderate intensity (you shouldn't be so out of breath that you couldn't talk while you are exercising). If you are used to riding a bike before pregnancy, you can continue this for as long as it feels safe and comfortable to do so.

Strengthening exercises

It is particularly important to strengthen the muscles around your back and pelvis during pregnancy, so your body can adequately support the growing baby. As your baby grows, your abdominal muscles will stretch. As they stretch, they become weaker. Therefore it is important to exercise these muscles to support your back, support your baby and encourage good posture.

To find these support muscles, place your hands on the lower part of your tummy, under the bump. You can lie, sit or stand while you do this. Breathe in through your nose & as you breathe out, draw your lower tummy in and away from your hand, then relax. Imagine you are giving your baby a gentle hug with your stomach muscles.

Then try to keep holding this contraction while you breathe in and out normally. Try to do this for 10 seconds and repeat 10 times. Do this five to six times a day. Also try to use these muscles with any activity requiring effort - lifting, bending, and getting up from a chair.

If you have done toning exercises for your arms and legs before becoming pregnant (for example, at the gym), it is perfectly safe that you continue these exercises. Just make sure you that you are only working moderately hard and that you continue to breathe normally while you exercise.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

Pelvic floor muscle exercises are really important to do while you are pregnant, and research has shown that if you do these exercises during pregnancy, you are less likely to have problems with bladder & bowel control after your baby arrives. Please refer to our pelvic floor muscle exercises handout for further information.

Classes

It is best to try and attend a specific pregnancy exercise class if possible. Low impact aerobics, yoga and Pilates are popular choices. Please ask your physiotherapist if you would like information about local classes.

If you have back or pelvic girdle pain or you have not exercised before, it is best to consult your women's health physiotherapist before you commence an exercise program.

Things to remember

- Make sure you wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing and appropriate footwear
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your exercise session
- Have something to eat about 30 minutes prior to exercising to give you some energy
- Work within your own limits - you should not become so breathless that you are unable to talk
- Do not exercise in a hot environment or if you feel unwell
- Do not exercise through pain
- Avoid participating in competitive or high injury risk activity (for example, skiing or scuba diving) while pregnant
- Avoid contact sports (for example, netball, hockey)
- Have fun and enjoy the many exercise benefits for you and your baby!