

Pregnancy and Exercise

Exercise during pregnancy can help your body best handle labor, delivery, and recovery. Moderate activity such as brisk walking or swimming is ideal during pregnancy. Some women enjoy prenatal yoga. Drink plenty of water before, during, and after you are active. This is very important when it's hot out.

Pelvic floor (Kegel) exercises

- * Do pelvic floor (Kegel) exercises during and after pregnancy.
- * They strengthen your lower pelvic muscles. They may help prevent urine control problems (incontinence) after childbirth.

HOW TO DO KEGEL EXERCISES

- * Find the muscles you use to stop urinating.
- * Squeeze these muscles for 3 seconds. Then relax for 3 seconds. Your stomach and thigh muscles should **not** tighten when you do this.
- * Add 1 second each week until you are able to squeeze for 10 seconds each time.
- * Repeat this exercise 10 to 15 times per session. Try to do this at least 3 times a day.
- * Don't do Kegels while you urinate. Doing them during urination can hurt your bladder.
- * Kegels work best when done on a regular schedule.

Walking for Wellness

Walking is one of the easiest ways to get the exercise you need to stay healthy.

Experts recommend at least 2½ hours of moderate activity (such as brisk walking, brisk cycling, or yard work) a week. It's fine to walk in blocks of 10 minutes or more throughout your day and week.

- * If you're worried about how brisk walking might affect your health, talk with your doctor before you start a walking program.
- * Start with a short-term goal. For example, walk for 5 or 10 minutes every day. Or increase your number of steps by 300 to 500 each day.
- * After you've made walking a habit, set a longer-term goal. You may want to set a goal of walking briskly for at least 30 minutes a day or work up to 10,000 steps a day. You can try to do this 5 days a week or more.
- * You can use a phone app or wear a pedometer to track your steps each day.
- * To stay motivated, find a walking partner, such as a family member, friend, or coworker. Daily dog walks are also a great way to keep up your walking routine.

Walk with others

- * Ask family members, friends, and coworkers to join you. Set goals together.
- * Join a walking group or club.
- * Set a goal to take part in an organized fitness walk.
- * Walk a dog every day.
- * Plan family outings around walks together. Being physically active with kids sets an example they'll follow as they grow older.

Add steps whenever you can

- * Schedule walks on your daily calendar.
- * Use a phone app or buy a pedometer.
 - * They count how many steps you take. The first time you use it, count how many steps you normally take in a day. Track your activity every day, and set a goal for increasing the number of steps each day. At first, try to add 300 to 500 steps to your day. Then work toward 2,000 more steps a day. A good long-term goal is to get 10,000 steps a day.
- * Instead of watching TV or going out to eat, go out for a walk.
- * At work, get up and move around once an hour.
- * When possible, walk to the grocery store, doctor appointments, work, school, or shopping. You could walk a lap around the grocery store before you start shopping.
- * Park your car farther away from work or other places you're going.
- * Walk around your neighborhood or around a park.
- * Walk during TV commercials.

Be safe

- * Know your surroundings. Walk in a well-lighted, safe place.
- * Carry a cell phone for emergencies.
- * Wear comfortable shoes and socks that cushion your feet.
- * Pay attention to your walking surface. Use sidewalks and paths.
- * If you usually walk outside and the weather is bad, take comfortable shoes to the mall and walk several laps inside.
- * Drink plenty of water before, during, and after you are active. This is very important when it's hot out and when you do intense exercise. Take a water bottle with you when you walk.

Here are some other exercises
that are good to do while
you are pregnant

Back press

This exercise strengthens your trunk and thighs, helping you maintain a healthy lower back posture during your pregnancy.

- * Place your feet 10 to 12 inches (25 to 30 centimeters) from the wall.
- * Rest your back flat against the wall and slide down the wall until your knees are slightly bent.
- * Press your lower back against the wall by pulling in your stomach muscles.
- * Hold for 6 seconds, and then relax your stomach muscles and slide back up the wall.
- * Repeat 8 to 12 times.



Backward stretch

This exercise stretches and strengthens your back, thigh, and pelvic muscles.

- * Kneel on hands and knees with your knees 8 in. (20 cm) to 10 in. (25 cm) apart, hands directly under your shoulders, and arms and back straight.
- * Keeping your arms straight, slowly lower your buttocks toward your heels and tuck your head toward your knees. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds.
- * Slowly return to the kneeling position.
- * Repeat 2 to 4 times.



Diagonal Curl

This exercise stretches your back, spine, and upper torso muscles.

- * Sit with your feet out in front, knees bent, and hands clasped in front of you.
- * Slowly twist your upper torso to the left and then to the right.
- * Twist to both sides a total of 5 times.



Forward bend

This exercise stretches and strengthens your back muscles.

- * Sit comfortably in a chair, and relax your arms.
- * Slowly bend forward, allowing your arms to hang down in front of you. Lean only as far as you can without feeling discomfort or pressure on your belly.
- * Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then slowly sit up straight.
- * Repeat 2 to 4 times or to your comfort level.



Leg lift crawl

This exercise strengthens your back and abdomen muscles.

- * Positioned on hands and knees, place your hands directly under your shoulders and straighten your arms.
- * Tighten your belly muscles by pulling in your belly button toward your spine. Be sure you continue to breathe normally, and do not hold your breath.
- * Lift your left knee and bring it toward your elbow.
- * Slowly extend your leg behind you without completely straightening it. Be careful not to let your hip drop down. Avoid arching your back.
- * Hold your leg behind you for about 6 seconds.
- * Return to your starting position.
- * Do the same exercise with your other leg.
- * Repeat 8 to 12 times for each leg.



Pelvic rocking

This exercise strengthens your back, hip, and abdomen muscles.

- * Positioned on your hands and knees, place your hands directly under your shoulders and your knees under your hips.
- * Breathe in deeply. Tuck your head downward and round your back up, making a curve with your back in the shape of the letter C. Hold this position for a count of 6.
- * Breathe out slowly and bring your head back up. Relax, keeping your back straight-don't allow it to curve toward the floor. Hold this for a count of 6.
- * Do this exercise 8 times or to your comfort level.



Pelvic tilt

This exercise strengthens your lower back and pelvis. It is for **use during the first 4 months of pregnancy**. After this point, lying on your back is not recommended, because it can cause blood circulation problems for you and your fetus.

- * Lie on your back.
- * Keep your knees relaxed.
- * Tighten your belly and buttocks muscles.
- * At the same time, gently shift your pelvis upward. This should flatten the curve in your back.
- * Hold for 6 seconds and then relax.
- * Gradually increase the number of tilts you do each day, to your comfort level.



Tailor press

This exercise stretches your hip and thigh muscles and strengthens your arm and leg muscles.

- * Bring the bottoms of your feet together, then draw them as close to your body as you can.
- * Cup your hands under your knees.
- * Press your knees toward the floor. At the same time, resist that force by pulling upward with your hands. Do this while slowly counting to 3. Relax.
- * Gradually increase the number of presses you do each day. A good goal is 10 times, twice daily.



Tailor sitting

This exercise stretches your hip and thigh muscles as you sit comfortably.

- * Sit on the floor.
- * Bring your feet close to your body while crossing your ankles.
- * Hold this position for as long as you are comfortable.



Tailor stretching

This exercise stretches the back, hamstrings, and arms. Sit with your back straight, legs about 12 inches (30 centimeters) apart, and feet relaxed outward.

- * Sit on the floor with your back straight, legs about 12 inches apart, and feet relaxed outward.
- * Stretch your hands forward toward your left foot, then sit up.
- * Stretch your hands straight forward, then sit up.
- * Stretch your hands forward toward your right foot, then sit up.
- * Hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.
- * Repeat 2 to 4 times.



Trunk twist

This exercise stretches your back, spine, and upper torso muscles.

- * Sit with your legs crossed.
- * Reach your left hand toward your left foot, and place your right hand at your side for support.
- * Slowly twist your torso to your right.
- * Switch your hands and twist to your left.
- * Repeat 2 to 4 times.




Upper body bends

This exercise strengthens your back and torso muscles.

- * Stand with your hands on your hips, legs apart, and knees slightly bent.
- * Keeping your upper back straight, bend forward slowly. You should feel a slight pull below your buttocks.
- * Bend a total of 10 times.



What you should avoid when
you are pregnant

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- * Medicines that are not approved by your doctor or midwife
 - * Alcohol and drugs
 - * Tobacco smoke
 - * Sources of food poisoning that may cause listeriosis or toxoplasmosis infection, such as raw meat, poultry, or seafood; unwashed fruits or vegetables; and cat feces or outdoor soil that cats commonly use
 - * Raw (unpasteurized) milk and cheeses made with raw milk
 - * Fish that contain high levels of mercury, such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, bigeye tuna, or tilefish from the Gulf of Mexico.
 - * Hazardous chemicals, radiation, and certain cosmetic products
 - * Caffeine (or limit your intake to 1 cup of coffee or tea each day)
 - * Things that raise your core body temperature, such as doing hot yoga or using hot tubs and saunas

What's okay when you
are pregnant

Sex

Sex causes no problems during an uncomplicated pregnancy, and sexual interest often changes during different phases of a pregnancy.

Working or going to school

If it isn't too physically demanding, working or going to school is usually fine during pregnancy. Scale back if you're becoming too worn down as your pregnancy progresses. Talk to your doctor or midwife if you are at risk for preterm labor.

Travel

Travel is usually a safe choice until later pregnancy. Talk to your doctor or midwife if you have any concerns. During your third trimester, it's best to stay within a few hours of a hospital, in case of sudden changes that need medical attention.

Wearing a seatbelt

Wearing a seat belt is vital to protect yourself and your baby during pregnancy.

When you are pregnant, wear a seat belt firmly across your lap, just below your abdomen. Position the shoulder belt diagonally between your breasts.



Massage

Massage during pregnancy is safe when it is done by a specially trained massage therapist.

- * Tell your massage therapist that you are pregnant.
- * Avoid aromatherapy oils, some of which can be unsafe during pregnancy.
- * Avoid massage of your belly. Firm massage of the pregnant belly could cause serious pregnancy complications.
- * Talk with your massage therapist about your body position during massage. There are special tables for use during pregnancy.
 - * As your pregnancy progresses, the best positions for you to be in are sitting on a chair or stool, or lying on your side (the left side is best later in pregnancy) during your massage.
 - * Starting in mid-pregnancy, avoid lying on your back. This will prevent extra weight from pressing on the major blood vessel called the vena cava.
 - * After 12 weeks of pregnancy (or much earlier if you are carrying twins or more), avoid lying on your belly so you don't increase strain and pressure on your uterus and low back.