



Common Questions about Exercise & Pregnancy

Now that I am pregnant is it safe to exercise as much as I did before? What if I am a beginner?

First ask your doctor, as any discussions on this topic can only be a general one. She or he knows you and can best assess any possible risks to your health or the health of your baby. Some activities like running or bicycling are a lot more strenuous than a walk in the park. Even so, you might be surprised of the activities that you can safely do, as long as you fall into the low risk category. Studies continue to show that if you are like most healthy women with uncomplicated pregnancies you could and should maintain your pre-pregnancy activity levels, doing so may convey short and long term benefits to both you and your baby. First time exercisers should proceed more cautiously. (In certain high risk cases your obstetrician can best advise you).

What level and amount of exercise are officially recommended?

Exercise three times a week or more at a comfortable pace, but limit the length and intensity of your workout cautions the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG). They feel you are overdoing it if it exhausts you, and advise you to warm up first, cool down afterwards and avoid getting overheated in warm weather. These guidelines, which recognize the importance of regular exercise for all healthy pregnant women, have stood the test of time. (Some researchers feel the guidelines don't go far enough and say that even a high-intensity level may have its place, so check with your doctor). ACOG recommends drinking plenty of water while you exercise; this will lessen the chance of injury to you or your baby.

What are the best types of exercise and what is off limits?

While ACOG believes that swimming and stationary cycling are the safest choices to keep you from being physically injured, others argue for more latitude. Most agree on walking and low impact aerobics. Do avoid activities with a potential for falling. Some researchers feel that weight bearing exercise at the levels recommended by ACOG is okay for sedentary women as early as the 8th week. If you have exercised regularly before the pregnancy they feel that you can safely expand your exercise repertoire and exercise level of moderate intensity all through your pregnancy for an hour 5 days a week. They usually discourage biking, hiking, or skiing at high elevations given the higher rates of pregnancy complications associated with living at higher altitudes above 10,000 feet.

How can women benefit from continuous high volume weight bearing exercise during pregnancy?

Regularly doing weight bearing exercise (i.e. aerobics or running) for an hour, five times a week during pregnancy keeps you fit and improves your overall cardiovascular function both during and after pregnancy. It improves your metabolism, helping keep your weight gain within healthy limits and to keep you more fat free. You experience less stress

and have better sense of well being, but, your biggest payoff may be a shorter, less complicated labor and a quick recovery once you have given birth.

How does the fetus benefit from continuing high volume weight bearing exercise?

Even by just exercising moderately in early pregnancy you are stimulating the growth of the placenta (from which your baby receives their nourishment in the womb). How much you exercise in late pregnancy greatly affects the baby's size at birth. Your baby will be less likely to suffer fetal distress both before and during labor. Researchers are also finding that a child whose mother exercised sufficiently during pregnancy is more likely to be leaner as a 5 year old and that neurodevelopment is improved both at birth and through age 5.

As far as diet is concerned, should I just count calories?

Your definition of a well balanced diet should consist of the types of carbohydrates you normally consume. This will have a significant effect on the weight you gain and your baby's birth weight. Obtaining carbohydrates from unprocessed sources like nuts, fruits and whole grain breads is healthier than the alternative for any woman. Don't just eat before or while you are exercising. The ideal eating pattern is 2-3 hours before exercising and immediately afterwards.

When should I be cautious and what danger signs should I look out for?

Stop exercising and notify your doctor at once if any of the following signs or symptoms occur: if you have any pain anywhere especially abdominal pain, vaginal bleeding on any amount, persistent contractions that last more than 20 minutes after exercising, no fetal movement for 20 minutes after you exercise, and or any fluid leakage from the vagina suggesting membrane rupture. You should be checked by your physician before resuming exercise if any of these things occur.