

Pregnancy & the Benefits of Exercise

Few women feel like running or exercising at any point during pregnancy. The weight gain, swollen hands/feet, low back stiffness can be tiring. However, it is important to try and remain physically active to some degree during this time. If you're not sure if exercise is right for you, consult your doctor and speak to your practitioner for further information.

There are many benefits from exercising while pregnant. For example, controlling weight gain, reducing swelling of hands and feet, easing the strain of tight and tired muscles, boosting your energy levels, and preventing constipation from occurring. By staying in good physical condition during pregnancy, you will also likely have a shorter and easier recovery time after birth.

There are many exercises that are usually safe during this time. Walking, swimming and even yoga. Again, check with your practitioner before proceeding. Walking is the cheapest and easiest thing to do, as it requires no equipment and can be done anywhere.

You should never do any kind of exercise that could potentially harm you or the baby, such as higher intensity aerobics, skiing, rock-climbing, or horseback riding. These activities require a lot of twisting and turning that may be hazardous and taxing on your low back and pelvis, not to mention the baby. Listen to your body while exercising, if it starts giving you signals that it is time to slow down, its best you should.

How can exercise help?

Feel Better: Exercise can increase your sense of control and boost your energy levels. Not only does it make you feel good by releasing endorphins (naturally occurring chemicals in the brain), but it can:

- *Reduce backache & improve posture by strengthening & toning muscles in your back, buttocks and thighs
- *Reduce constipation by accelerating the movement in your intestines (peristalsis)
- *Prevents wear & tear on your joints (which become looser during pregnancy due to hormonal changes) by activating lubricating fluid in your joints
- *Helps you sleep better by relieving stress and anxiety that may make you restless at night



Look Better: Exercise increases the blood flow to your skin, giving you a healthy glow.

Preparation for Birth: Strong muscles & a fit cardiovascular system can greatly ease labour and delivery. With control over your breathing it can help manage pain.

Regain your pre-pregnancy body quicker: You'll gain less 'fat' weight during pregnancy if you continue to exercise (assuming you were active before). However, don't expect to try to lose weight with exercise while pregnant. For most women the goal is to maintain their fitness level throughout pregnancy.

Reducing Possible Complications: Some studies have shown exercise may even lower the risks of acquiring complications such as gestational diabetes and preeclampsia (hypertension arising in pregnancy).

Kegel's

Dr. Arthur Kegel, a physician who recommended 'Kegel' exercises to his female patients in the 1940's for pregnancy; used the exercise to target the pelvic floor muscles by helping to strengthen the urethra, bladder, uterus and rectum. Both women and men can use these exercises, however, only women will have the childbirth benefits.

Kegel exercises allow for a stronger pelvic floor, making it easier to push and expel the baby during the birthing process. It also reduces the chances of tearing during this time. During post-partum periods, women are encouraged to continue to use Kegel exercise to help the healing of an episiotomy, to prevent incontinence and toning of the vaginal muscles after birth. Here's how:

- *Contract your muscles as if you were trying to stop the flow of urine
- *Hold for 5 seconds and slowly release
- *Repeat 10 times

When contracting the pelvic muscles, be sure to avoid squeezing the buttocks and abdominals. This exercise is not meant for these muscles.

Pelvic Tilts

- *Lying on your back, arms at your side, legs bent and apart.
- *Raise your pelvis up off the floor and hold for 5 seconds.
- *Relax. Repeat 2 sets of 10-12 reps.

For more information on how exercise and hands on treatment can help your pregnancy or to book an appointment with our pre-natal expert, call **416.760.8280** or email: **info@physioplushealth.com**

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