

Guidelines for exercise in pregnancy

Adapted from American College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (2002)

These guidelines are for an uncomplicated pregnancy and should not be followed if it goes against the advice of a health professional. If in doubt seek professional advice. The client's history should always be taken into account.

Women should still try to get an accumulation of 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day for most or all days of the week.

Activities to avoid:

Diving, skiing, mountaineering, water skiing, trampoline, gymnastics, netball, hockey, contact sports, avoid activities that are unstable or raise heart rate too high for too long. Scuba diving should be avoided and not going higher than altitudes greater than 6,000ft.

It has been deemed safe to resume exercise whilst breast feeding, moderate weight reduction while lactating does not adversely affect a baby's weight gain and exercise has been associated with decreased incidence of depression.

The following conditions are contraindications to vigorous exercise:

- High blood pressure
- Anaemia or other blood disorders
- Thyroid disease
- Diabetes
- Cardiac irregularities
- Previous rapid labour
- Slower than expected growth during pregnancy
- Bleeding during pregnancy
- Breech presentation during third trimester
- Excessive obesity
- Extreme underweight
- History of 3 or more spontaneous miscarriages
- Ruptured membranes
- Premature labour
- Multiple pregnancies
- Incompetent cervix
- Diagnosis of placenta praevia
- Diagnosis of cardiac disease

Screening during pregnancy is very important

Symptoms that require the immediate cessation of exercise are pain, bleeding or ruptured membranes, uterine contractions (not the normal Braxton-Hicks contractions), dizziness or fainting, vomiting or nausea, water retention, or decreased foetal movements.

Considerations for Trimester 1 (0-12wks)

The hormonal effects of trimester one can be considerable and vary with the individual. If you are used to exercise then it is acceptable to 'carry on as normal' although it is wise to look to lower the intensity of the exercise.

Considerations for Trimester 2 (13-28wks)

A visible bump is now developing. Abdominals are lengthening in all directions. The baby can be felt moving. Hormone levels rise more steeply as the placenta takes over endocrine function from the ovaries. Joint stability may be compromised due the hormone relaxin. The weight of the uterus on the blood vessels may cause supine hypotensive syndrome (fainting whilst lying on your back). Balance can be affected if standing on one foot as the centre of gravity begins to shift. Relaxation of the oesophagus and stomach may cause heartburn – therefore in activities such as some yoga positions, the head and shoulders should remain lifted above abdominal level.

Aerobic activity is fine if the client remains cool and well hydrated and listens to their own body. From 20 weeks onwards, intense rectal abdominal work (curl ups) is counter-productive and may result in diastasis (division of the muscles) and so should be avoided. Gentle pelvic tilts, postural work and pelvic floor are fine. Lower back extensions and trapezius exercises are ideal.

Considerations for Trimester 3 (29 – end of pregnancy)

Mobility becomes harder and the baby's growth demands more of mother's energy. Use pillows or foam props to help find best lying/ sitting positions. Do not stretch to gain flexibility, relaxin in the body means joints are already relaxed. Limit length of isometric holds to 15 seconds to avoid increase in blood pressure and raised intra-abdominal pressure. Avoid sudden increases in intensity that may increase breathlessness and over-heating. Reinforce good posture Reduce length and duration of exercise. Modify lateral flexion to protect knees, spine, pelvis
Avoid high impact activities, avoid wide squatting activities.

General Advice

Listen to your body, if it doesn't feel right then stop. Keep taking sips of water and eat complex carbohydrates snacks. Avoid over heating by lowering intensity, wearing suitable clothing, ventilation, avoid prolonged bouts of exercise (30 mins plus). Avoid over-stretching and avoid ballistic, asymmetrical moves and rapid changes of direction and emphasize development of core stability.