

Exercising during pregnancy

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"We all know that exercise is good for us, but taking gentle exercise when pregnant can be particularly beneficial. While there may be times during your pregnancy that you feel tired, exercise can in fact give you more energy, strength and stamina to cope."

Exercising when pregnant can:

- Give you more energy and strength
- Increase blood-flow to ease constipation, cramps and backache
- Help you sleep
- Release endorphins which can lift your mood
- Help you to keep in shape and regain your pre-pregnancy figure more quickly once your baby is born
- Increase your stamina, muscle tone and pelvic floor strength ready for labour

Choosing a safe form of exercise

Whether you're new to exercise or used to pounding the pavements, embarking on a strenuous new regime is not advised. Pregnancy exercise should be low-impact, gentle and relaxing. As a general rule, any activity you were used to performing before you became pregnant is usually safe to continue with, but always check with your midwife that what you're planning to do is safe for you and your baby.

Some types of exercise are perfect for pregnancy:

- Pilates or yoga – classes which focus on gentle stretching and breathing are best. Strenuous forms of yoga such as Bikram and Ashtanga are not advised. It's always worth letting your instructor how many weeks pregnant you are before a class.
- Walking or light jogging – a trip out into the fresh air can benefit both your mind and body. Keep it gentle and listen to your body.
- Swimming - Aquanatal classes are designed to let mums-to-be exercise safely as the water helps to support the extra weight.
- Dancing – A dance class will not only tone your muscles, it will also lift your mood. To make things easier, avoid jumping, try keeping one foot on the floor, making fewer arm movements and missing out any sharp turns.
- Cycling – Although it's safe to cycle during the early stages of pregnancy, as you progress to the later stages your centre of balance changes which can make you more wobbly and put you at risk of falling off. While it's not a real problem on a static bike in the gym, it could prove dangerous out on the streets. If you do choose to cycle, a gel seat can make things more comfortable.
- Weight training – Weight training should only be performed if you trained before you became pregnant. If you're training at a gym, ask an instructor to show you some pregnancy-safe positions as certain moves, such as lifting weights above your head or abdomen, should be avoided. Your gym may also require you to take a risk assessment.

Tips for healthy pregnancy exercise

- Eat a high-carbohydrate meal at least an hour beforehand to give you enough energy
- Always ensure your instructor knows you're pregnant. Some instructors are qualified to give specialist advice
- Avoid getting overheated for long periods
- Wear a well-fitting sports bra and the right, supportive footwear
- Drink lots of water before and after, and remember to sip in-between
- Remember that as your bump grows, your centre of balance changes so you may be more unsteady on your feet
- Listen to your body. Don't overdo it and if you feel dizzy, faint, in pain, too tired or too hot, it's always best to stop.

Activities to avoid

Some types of exercise can put a lot of strain on your body and put your baby at risk, that's why it's advised that you avoid the following kinds:

- Skiing
- Horse riding
- Backpacking
- Scuba-diving
- Heavy weight lifting
- High-impact sports, contact sports such as martial arts or boxing
- Activities involving heights like climbing or abseiling

If there's a type of exercise you'd like to do and you're not sure whether it's safe, or if you have any general questions about keeping fit during pregnancy, you can ask our Careline. They're available by phone on **08457 623 628** or via our instant messaging service, Live Chat.