

Exercise Guidelines During Pregnancy

Exercising at least 30 minutes per day can benefit your health during pregnancy by helping to reduce backaches, constipation, bloating and swelling. It also increases your energy, improves your mood, improves your posture, promotes muscle tone, strength and endurance, and can help you sleep better. Exercise can even help prevent or treat gestational diabetes. Exercise can also help keep you fit during pregnancy and may improve your ability to cope with labor. Finally, it will make it easier to get back in shape after the baby is born.

The hormones produced in your body during pregnancy can cause the ligaments that support your joints to become relaxed. This can put you at a risk of injury by making your joints more mobile. As you progress in your pregnancy, the extra weight in the front of your body shifts your center of gravity and can place stress on your joints and muscles, especially those in the pelvis and lower back. As a result, you are less stable, and this increases your risk of losing your balance and falling.

Exercises that are safe during pregnancy, even for beginners, include walking, swimming, cycling and low impact aerobics. If you were a runner before you became pregnant, you can often keep running during pregnancy, but you might have to modify your routine.

Exercises that should be avoided during pregnancy are activities where there is a high risk of falling, such as gymnastics, water skiing, and horseback riding. Other activities to avoid include downhill skiing, all contact sports (such as hockey, basketball and soccer) and scuba diving. While you are exercising, try to avoid activities that call for jumping, jarring movements, or quick changes in direction. These actions can strain your joints and may cause injury.

There is also the risk of becoming overheated during pregnancy, which can cause a loss of fluids and lead to dehydration. When you exercise, follow these guidelines for a safe and healthy exercise routine:

- * Avoid laying flat on your back after the first trimester
- * Avoid strenuous exercise in hot, humid weather or if you have a fever
- * Wear comfortable, cool clothing
- * Drink plenty of water
- * Be sure to consume the extra calories that are needed during your pregnancy
- * If it has been some time since you last exercised, start your routine slowly. Begin with exercising 5 minutes a day and slowly add 5 minutes per week until you are up to 30 minutes a day.

STOP exercising and call your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms: vaginal bleeding, dizziness or feeling faint, increased shortness of breath, chest pain, headache, muscle weakness, calf pain or swelling, uterine contractions, decreased fetal movement, or fluid leaking from the vagina.

These guidelines are taken from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.