

PERINATAL HEALTH & WELLNESS:

Strength Training During Pregnancy



Take a Pregnant Pause?

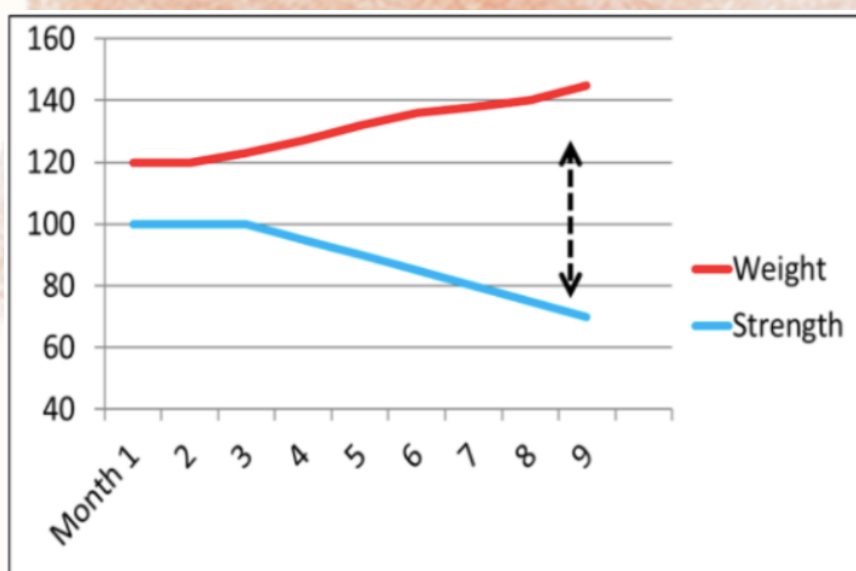
It's kind of scary, seeing that positive test. All of a sudden you're questioning all of your daily choices! Naturally, this is when women tend to trade their heavier weights in for lighter weights, body weight exercises, or even only doing cardio, assuming that it's safer.

This is common because up until recently, women were told to not get our HR too high, reduce weight lifting to minimize risk of injury, and that high intensity exercise prevents blood/oxygen from getting to baby and should be discontinued immediately.

People are learning more about pregnancy and fitness (thankfully) and although injury prevention and baby's safety are still the top priorities, it's important to note that reducing resistance / loads may actually **WEAKEN** you to the point of **increasing your risk for injury**. On top of this, high intensity exercise is not contraindicated for the **AVERAGE** active prenatal fitness client. Despite this, **YOU SHOULD STILL ALWAYS CONSULT YOUR MEDICAL PROVIDER.**

The Inverse Relationship of Weight Gain and Strength

Below is a very simple chart showing a typical pregnancy weight gain vs strength trend most women follow. Even women who continue to attempt lifting heavy as possible, there will likely still be limitations and weakening. You can blame hormones for that. Knowing this natural inverse relationship, however... tells you that if a woman stops (or significantly reduces) the loads she's been lifting, her muscles will de-condition and lose strength at an even greater rate. We know that muscles must be increasingly stressed in order to tolerate greater amounts of stress (See: progressive overload theory). So if we don't continue to stress our muscles with greater loads, then they will not change and adapt. In other words, for a woman who does not continue resistance training, she'll be her weakest when she's at her heaviest. This leads to back pain, pelvic floor issues, and maladaptive movement patterns. She will likely be less able to adequately manage the added stress on her body as her belly expands, her center of gravity is shifted forward, and as she is moving through her activities of daily living.



Source: Prenatal Fitness

Benefits of Strength Training During Pregnancy

There are SO many benefits to strength training during pregnancy. Not just physical, but mental as well! Here's a quick list of what you'll gain by picking up the weights SAFELY with proper training:

- Limits lower back pain by helping you maintain strength of your stabilizers (transverse abdominis, multifidus, diaphragm, and pelvic floor muscles)
- Helps you maintain optimal posture, prevents excessive pelvic tilt, rounded shoulders
- Prevents pelvic floor dysfunction as improved posture allows your pelvic floor to be well-positioned to handle the increased weight of baby.
- Better breathing! With better posture, your diaphragm is able to expand better and your pelvic floor is also able to respond to each breath, creating more room for air even with a baby taking up all the space
- Reduces stretch of the anterior abdominal muscles, thus possibly creating less strain on your fascia and creating less diastasis recti.
- Controls pregnancy weight gain
- Faster and easier labor and delivery
- Smoother postpartum recovery
- Gives you a mental break and reduces stress
- Lowers cortisol levels, increases serotonin - all great for baby!

The Lasting Effects

As stated, maintaining strength during pregnancy has so many benefits, and these benefits are carried on through the postpartum period. Just like the benefits, issues of weakness, imbalances, dysfunction, and poor posture can easily last into the postpartum period as well. When your child is born, and **ESPECIALLY** if you are raising older kids (i.e., a toddler who weighs 30 pounds and still needs help getting into their SUV and their rear facing car seat), you are doing a LOT of squatting, bending, lifting, twisting, and carrying. You are doing putting a lot of strain on a stretched out / weakened core. You may be still recovering from your last ten months of pregnancy glory and labor/delivery, but alas, duty calls. Improper (or lack of) strengthening, coordination, and corrective exercise during pregnancy can exacerbate these pains and weaknesses during the postpartum period, leading to increased diastasis recti, pelvic floor issues (prolapse, incontinence), and back pain.

The goal with strength training during pregnancy is to ensure that women have the strength to bend down and pick up their children, to lift and lower them into cribs, and to maneuver through all the other daily activities without throwing out their causing dysfunction or living in pain. The goal is to be able to move however your family needs you to move.

Cardiovascular Endurance

Although this is mainly about strength training, we cannot forget that being pregnant and having a baby is a MARATHON. It requires a lot of adaptations, patience, and endurance. It requires you to move as if you're not carrying an extra 30lbs of fat, blood, placenta, breast tissue, and baby. Your body is working harder to circulate oxygen and blood, with increased vasodilation and decreased blood pressure. You feel winded more quickly. I know you're tired, but your goal is to prepare for the demands of birth. Interval training will do that because it most closely resembles birth itself: the rest and work intervals such as during increasingly intense contractions and pushing the baby out during said contractions.

What kind of interval work is best for you? That depends on how far along you are, your previous fitness level, and your strength. Running and jumping are technically perfectly safe, but do cause additional strain on your pelvic floor. There is a high reward and low risk in interval walking (especially hills), swimming, stationary bicycle/cycling (be aware of your pelvic alignment), and using the elliptical.

Knowing when to take it back a notch is critical during any exercise, especially endurance training / interval work. It is often recommended to use the Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) scale. You should be able to talk, but with more effort. Once breathing becomes difficult or you're panting, take it down a notch.

When and How Often?

Depending on your fitness level prior to pregnancy, you want to start off slow. It is typically recommended that beginners start working out 2-3 times per week until they have increased strength and endurance, with core work, stretch/mobility work sprinkled in throughout the week. For cardiovascular endurance, beginners should aim for 2-3 times per week of 30 minutes of continuous cardio, increasing to five days per week when able. For those who are more experienced, 3-4 days of strength training and 5 days per week is recommended, with cardio and stretch/mobility work added to the regimen.

The "Dos" and "Don'ts"

Do:

- **Check with your physician**
- Start Slow
- Stay Hydrated
- Consume enough calories throughout the day to maintain pregnancy and active lifestyle
- Prevent exercise-induced hypoglycemia by eating a protein/carb snack within an hour of exercise
- Listen to your body, modify exercises or remove altogether if needed
- Stretch

Don't:

- Use jerky, jarring, and twisting movements while pregnant or immediately postpartum
- Make quick directional changes if not used to them
- Hold your breath during lifts
- Engage in unfamiliar activities / exercises
- Lie flat on your back starting with your 5th month. Use a 30deg incline
- Push yourself if dizzy, lightheaded, or unable to catch breath.

Questions?



A well-prepared momma is a happy momma.

1:1 Virtual services include education and training on:
Pregnancy and postpartum mental health and wellness
Preparing for the "fourth trimester"

Communication with partners, safeguarding your relationships

Infant / Toddler safety and development

Personalized pain management, ergonomics, and home setup tips

Personal training services for pre/postnatal clients



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