

**Exercise in Pregnancy**

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC) recommend that all women without contraindications should be encouraged to participate in aerobic and strength-conditioning exercises as part of a healthy lifestyle during their pregnancy. Recent investigations, focusing on both aerobic and strength-conditioning exercise regimens in pregnancy, have shown no increase in early pregnancy loss, late pregnancy complications, abnormal fetal growth, or adverse neonatal outcomes.

**Benefits of exercise**

Regular exercise during pregnancy can improve posture and decrease some common discomforts such as backaches and [fatigue](http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/weakness-and-fatigue-topic-overview). There is evidence that physical activity may prevent [gestational diabetes](http://www.webmd.com/baby/tc/gestational-diabetes-topic-overview) (development of diabetes during pregnancy), hypertension, excess weight gain and varicose veins. Reasonable exercise can also maintain muscular and cardiovascular fitness, relieve stress, improve blood circulation, your social/emotional wellbeing, and build more stamina needed for [labour and delivery](http://www.webmd.com/baby/guide/labor-signs).

If you were physically active *before* pregnancy, you are able to continue your activity in moderation. Don't try to exercise at your former level; instead, exercise at a comfortable level, i.e. low impact [aerobics](http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/tc/fitness-aerobic-fitness) versus high impact.

If you have *never* exercised regularly before, you can safely begin an exercise program during pregnancy after consulting with your healthcare provider, but do not try a new, strenuous activity. Start at 3 times a week and progress to 4. Try for 15 minutes per session even if it means taking breaks and gradually increasing to 30 minutes or more.

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| **Maternal Age** | **Heart Rate Target Zone** |
| Less than 20 | 140 – 155 beats/min |
| 20-29 | 135 – 150 beats/min |
| 30-39 | 130 – 145 beats/min |
| 40 and over | 125 – 140 beats/min |

**What exercises are SAFE during pregnancy?**

Reasonable exertion in aerobic conditioning or moderate-intensity physical activity in pregnancy should be able to maintain a good fitness level. Some safe and productive activities include [swimming](http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/fitness-basics-swimming-is-for-everyone), brisk walking, indoor stationary cycling, gentle yoga or Pilates, step or elliptical machines, and low-impact aerobics (taught by a certified aerobics instructor). These activities carry little risk of injury, benefit your entire body, and can be continued until birth. Avoid exercises that will risk loss of balance and fetal trauma. Tennis and racquetball are generally safe activities, but changes in balance may affect rapid movements. [Jogging](http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/guide/fitness-basics-running-for-your-life) can be done in moderation, especially if you practiced before pregnancy. You may want to choose exercises or activities that do not require great balance or coordination, especially later in pregnancy.

**Who should NOT exercise during pregnancy?**

Absolute Contraindications

• Ruptured membranes

• Preterm labour

• Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy

• Incompetent cervix

• Growth restricted baby

• High order multiple gestation (≥ triplets)

• Placenta previa after 28th week

• Persistent 2nd or 3rd trimester bleeding

• Uncontrolled type 1 diabetes, thyroid disease, or other serious cardiovascular, respiratory, or systemic disorder

Relative Contraindications

• Previous spontaneous abortion

• Previous preterm birth

• Mild/moderate cardiovascular disorder

• Mild/moderate respiratory disorder

• Anemia (Hb <100 g/L)

• Malnutrition/eating disorder/underweight

• Twin pregnancy after 28th week

• Other significant medical conditions

**What exercises should be AVOIDED in pregnancy?**

There are certain exercises and activities that can be harmful. Please consult with your midwife prior to carrying out any of the following activities:

• Holding your breath during any activity.

• Activities where falling is likely (skiing and horseback riding).

• Contact sports: softball, football, basketball, and volleyball.

• Exercises that may cause any mild abdominal trauma such as activities that have jarring motions or rapid changes in direction.

• Activities that require extensive jumping, hopping, skipping, bouncing, or running.

• Deep knee bends, full sit-ups, double leg raises, and straight-leg toe touches.

• Bouncing while [stretching](http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/tc/fitness-flexibility).

• Waist-twisting movements while standing.

• Heavy exercise spurts followed by long periods of no activity.

• Exercise in hot, humid weather.

**What should a pregnancy exercise program consist of?**

For total fitness, a pregnancy exercise program should strengthen and condition your muscles. Always begin by warming up for 5 minutes and stretching for 5 minutes. Include at least 15 minutes of cardiovascular activity. Check your heart rate at times of peak activity. Follow aerobic activity with 5 – 10 minutes of gradually slower exercise that ends with gentle stretching.

Some basic exercise guidelines to follow:

• Wear loose fitting, comfortable clothes and a good supported bra.

• Choose shoes that are designed for the type of exercise. Proper shoes are your best protection against injury.

• Exercise on a flat, level surface to prevent injury.

• Consume enough calories to meet the needs of your pregnancy and exercise program (300 or more calories per day) • Finish eating at least one hour before exercising.

• Never exercise to the point of exhaustion. You should be able to carry on a verbal conversation while exercising.

• Drink plenty of water before, during, and after your workout.

• After doing floor exercises, get up slowly and gradually to prevent [dizziness](http://www.webmd.com/brain/tc/dizziness-lightheadedness-and-vertigo-topic-overview).

**What pregnancy changes may affect exercise?**

Physical changes during pregnancy create extra demands on your body. Remember that you need to listen to your body and adjust your activities or exercise routine as necessary.

• Your developing baby and other internal changes require more oxygen and energy.

• Hormones produced during pregnancy cause the ligaments that support your joints to stretch and loosen up, increasing the risk of injury.

• The extra [weight](http://www.webmd.com/diet/tc/healthy-weight-what-is-a-healthy-weight) with the uneven distribution shifts your centre of gravity. The extra weight also exerts stress on joints and muscles in the lower back and pelvic area, which makes it easier to lose your balance.

**Safety Warning for pregnant women**

Stop exercising and seek medical attention if…

• Feel chest [pain](http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/default.htm).

• Have abdominal pain, [pelvic pain](http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/guide/default.htm), or persistent contractions.

• Have a [headache](http://www.webmd.com/migraines-headaches/default.htm).

• Notice an absence or decrease in fetal movement.

• Feel faint, dizzy, nauseous, or light-headed.

• Feel cold or clammy.

• Have [vaginal bleeding](http://women.webmd.com/tc/abnormal-vaginal-bleeding-topic-overview).

• Have a sudden gush of fluid from the vagina or a trickle of fluid that leaks steadily.

• Notice an irregular or rapid heartbeat.

• Have sudden swelling in your ankles, hands, face, or calf pain.

• Excessive short of breath

• Have difficulty walking.

• Have muscle weakness.

Developed from SOGC & CSEP