

Exercise

This sheet is about exposure to exercise in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

Can I exercise during pregnancy?

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that people who are pregnant without medical or pregnancy complications consider at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most, if not all, days of the week.

You may not be able to exercise while pregnant if you have experienced preterm delivery (birth before week 37), ongoing vaginal bleeding, contractions, or other pregnancy-related complications. Please check with your healthcare provider if you are unsure if you should exercise during pregnancy. You should also check with your healthcare provider before starting or continuing an exercise program if you have a history of medical concerns such as heart or lung problems or high blood pressure.

Does exercise harm my pregnancy in any way?

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Also, miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. When done in moderation and under the guidance of your healthcare provider, exercise is not expected to increase the chance of miscarriage, birth defects, or preterm delivery. Studies show no relationship between exercise and distress or heart rate changes in a fetus. One study found that moderate to high intensity exercise in the later stages of pregnancy can lead to smaller, leaner babies that are still within the normal range.

Will exercise be harder during pregnancy?

Your body will go through many changes throughout pregnancy that could affect your ability and tolerance to exercise. As a pregnancy goes on, the amount of blood in your body and your heart rate increases. This means your body works harder to give enough nutrients and oxygen to both you and your pregnancy, so there is less oxygen available for exercise. This change in blood flow could also make you feel lightheaded.

As your pregnancy grows larger, your sense of balance shifts, meaning that you may need to adjust your posture. This shift in posture can make certain types of exercise (such as running, yoga, and free weights) more challenging. Joints also become looser due to hormonal changes. Looser joints mean there is a higher chance of strains or sprains during otherwise routine movements and exercise.

What are the benefits of exercising during pregnancy?

Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. It may improve mood and sleep patterns, and might help prevent or treat gestational diabetes. Exercise may also ease some of the common discomforts of pregnancy such as constipation, backache, fatigue, leg swelling, and varicose veins.

What are some basic guidelines for exercising during pregnancy?

If your pregnancy is not high risk, and you have checked with your healthcare provider, some basic guidelines to keep in mind include:

- Exercise most days of the week, with a goal of 20-30 minutes a day.
- During the second and third trimesters, avoid exercise that involves lying flat on your back because this causes less blood flow for both you and your pregnancy.
- Avoid exercising to the point where you are exhausted or out of breath.
- Be aware that your sense of balance will change throughout pregnancy, which could lead to falls.
- Drink plenty of fluids before and during exercise.
- Avoid overheating your body, especially in the first trimester.

What types of exercises are good choices during pregnancy?

Most people can continue their pre-pregnancy exercise routine during pregnancy, but you may need to modify some activities. Listen to your body and stop when you feel too tired or if you feel dizziness, headaches, muscle weakness, nausea, chest pain, fewer fetal movements, or have contractions. Do not get discouraged: even mild to moderate exercise can help your fitness level and mood.

Most people can participate in a wide range of recreational activities. Non-weight bearing exercises such as stationary cycling, swimming, or water aerobics are easiest on your body throughout your entire pregnancy. Check with your healthcare provider if you are wondering if you should try a certain type of exercise or activity.

What types of exercise should I try to avoid during pregnancy?

Avoid exercise or activities that can increase the chance of injury or falls. Contact sports such as ice hockey, soccer, and basketball could result in trauma to both you and your pregnancy. Also, the chance of falling during activities such as gymnastics, horseback riding, jet skiing, water skiing, surfing, and downhill skiing may be higher during pregnancy from balance changes. Scuba diving, skydiving, and any exercise at or above altitudes of 6,000 feet are not recommended since they are all associated with lower oxygen levels. Hot yoga (also known as Bikram yoga) and hot Pilates are done in rooms typically between 95°F and 104°F (35°C to 40°C). These activities are not recommended during pregnancy due to the very high temperatures and lack of information in pregnancy. Check with your healthcare provider if you are wondering if you should try a certain type of exercise or activity.

If I am doing intense training, is there anything I should consider while pregnant?

Talk with your healthcare provider about your training and goals. As an athlete, you may need to modify your training program in each stage of pregnancy. While there may be risk involved in physical activity for some people, most healthcare providers believe that the benefits of being active far outweigh the risks, even for those who wish to continue participation at an elite level. Your pre-pregnancy levels of fitness, as well your particular sport, must be considered when planning how intensely, how long, and how often you exercise. When done under the care and guidance of your healthcare provider, it is unlikely that your exercise program or sport will cause problems.

Studies have found that some athletes use supplementation to enhance performance. However, information on the use of supplements in pregnancy is often very limited. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider if you are thinking about taking any sort of supplementation. You can also contact MotherToBaby for any questions about specific supplements and pregnancy.

When can I begin to exercise after giving birth?

Talk to your healthcare provider to find out how soon you can begin to exercise after giving birth. Your body will continue to go through changes from your pregnancy for many weeks after your baby is born. How long you should wait will depend on a few factors, including how active you were able to be during pregnancy, any health problems you have, and what type of delivery you had.

Breastfeeding while exercising:

When done in moderation and under the guidance of your healthcare provider, exercise is not expected to affect breastfeeding. Most people will make the same amount of milk whether they exercise or not. However, it is extremely important to drink a lot of water when breastfeeding, especially if you are exercising. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a male exercises, could it affect fertility (ability to get partner pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects?

Based on the studies reviewed, exercise is not expected to affect male fertility. Studies have not been done to see if exercise could increase the chance of birth defects above the background risk. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/>.

Please click here for references.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at [MotherToBaby.org](https://www.MotherToBaby.org).

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