

& Pregnancy exercise



Pregnancy is a wonderful experience for most women. Nothing in the world quite compares to the feeling and knowledge that you are growing your baby inside you. Words cannot do justice to the intense feelings you will experience when you feel your baby kick for the first time, or when you see the ultrasound pictures of your child. Alas, words also cannot do justice to the gruelling experience of labour and childbirth and the pain of sciatica or carpal tunnel syndrome! Yes, pregnancy and child birth are magical, but they also exert an extreme amount of pressure on your body.

Try to resist the urge to sleep your way through pregnancy, honestly, the best thing for your baby and for you, is in fact to exercise during pregnancy. Exercising during pregnancy, in conjunction with a healthy diet, is an ideal way to prepare your body for child birth. Not only this, but it will help you deal with the physical aspects of pregnancy, help you feel better about your ever expanding body, have more energy and quite importantly for most women, it will help your body to regain some shape after you have given birth. Some evidence has showed that mothers who exercised during pregnancy have children who grow up leaner and fitter. However, you should approach exercise during pregnancy with some caution. Extreme changes in your diet or exercise regime should not be attempted, especially

without consulting your physician first. Also you should avoid contact sports, skiing and extreme sports activities such as sky diving, water skiing, any exercises that take place at high altitude or any exercises in which you are at risk of falling, such as horseback riding or cycling (from the second trimester onwards). You can regularly take part in ante natal Yoga, which is great for stretching your body out, opening up the pelvic region and strengthening your muscles. Also, antenatal swimming classes are usually highly recommended by health and sports officials alike. Being in the water whilst pregnant is a joy, as the water will support your weight. Taking part in antenatal exercise classes such as Yoga and swimming are also excellent ways to meet other pregnant women!

Fatigue and morning sickness are common side effects experienced during the first trimester and exercising may help to combat these. Try to exercise three to four times a week and concentrate on low impact activities (no bouncing or jumping!). Make sure you support your growing bosom with a sturdy sports bra and also ensure you warm up thoroughly before commencing any exercises. Brisk walking is an excellent exercise throughout pregnancy and one you may favour during your second trimester. As your bump gets bigger, even low impact exercises may seem too difficult to contemplate, so

now is a good time to start antenatal swimming. Pelvic floor exercises are also essential (for the rest of your life!). Pregnancy incontinence is no laughing matter (you will learn this and soon it will become natural to clench before you giggle) and your bouncing baby will literally be bouncing and kicking your bladder, so if you intend to go for long walks, ensure there are toilets along the way!

By the third trimester you will probably have started sleeping on your side, as it is important you do not lie on your back, otherwise you may restrict blood flow to the placenta. So, take heed and avoid any exercises which involved lying on your back!

Beware your sense of balance may fail you and also be forewarned that Braxton Hicks may increase after or during exercise! However, try to keep up with regular exercises, at least three times a week. Just be sure to rest your body in-between. Take care of your back during pregnancy by doing 'cat position' stretches (on all fours, arch back upwards). Also ensure you have the correct footwear during exercising. Buy good quality sports trainer, from recognised and respected brands—Reebok, Nike etc. It is common for your feet to go up a shoe size during pregnancy, so do not despair if you find yourself checking out the mens Adidas trainers section!

— DAVID SPRUCE

