Health & exercise during pregnancy
Health and Exercise During Pregnancy

Congratulations you’re pregnant!

Exercise during pregnancy, as long as the exercise is appropriate for each stage, has many positive benefits for you and your baby. Maintaining a good fitness level will help prepare you for the birth and helps with a quick recovery.

Trimester 1 (1 - 12 weeks)
Changes are happening to your body, although physically you may not change too much in shape you may notice some of the following:

- weight gain, as your body starts to store fat for your baby
- nausea can be experienced at any point throughout the day and can result in some women losing weight if they are actually sick
- more tired than normal, exhausted might be a better word to describe it! Your body is going through so many changes and uses so much energy creating a new life
- being more emotional than usual, due to the increased hormones in your body
- breast tenderness

Exercise during trimester 1
If you are a regular exerciser then continue as normal whether it’s aerobics, swimming, running or gym work. If you normally lift weights keep using the weights you are familiar with - this is not the time to increase your weights. You may feel exhausted, nauseous and unable to keep to your regular routine - try to keep active as it is good for both you and your baby.

Some women suffer from low blood pressure due to hormonal changes, this can leave you feeling lightheaded and dizzy, if you are affected in this way you may want to avoid certain exercises. If your symptoms are severe then you may have to avoid your regular exercise routine until the symptoms subside or disappear, usually around week 20. If your dizziness continues you must take a break from your exercise programme. Consult your doctor or midwife if you have any of these symptoms.

If you are a beginner to exercise you should consult your doctor for medical clearance before starting an exercise programme - this is not the time to get fit, lose weight, start boxing/kick aerobics or high intensity aerobics but instead to maintain a good level of fitness throughout your pregnancy. A simple walking programme may be all you need.
Trimester 2 (13 - 28 weeks)
During this time, women are described as “blooming or blossoming” and you may experience some of the following:

- less nausea and renewed energy levels, although some women can experience continued nausea and lower energy levels
- bump appears and your weight increases as the baby continues to grow
- looser joints and ligaments, which can cause some aches and pains
- breathlessness during exercise/activities caused by your diaphragm being pushed up - this is due to your baby increasing in size
- fluid retention at varying levels
- slightly off balance at times, due to the centre of gravity changing
- light headed when you are lying on your back or when you stand up from a lower position
- visiting the toilet more often, as the size of your baby reduces the capacity of your bladder, adding pressure on it
- loss of concentration can occur and possibly forgetfulness or clumsiness

Trimester 3 (29 - 40) weeks
You will experience most of the changes listed for trimester 2. You will be getting bigger so you may feel fatigued due to the extra weight. Increased shortness of breath and more trips to the bathroom are expected. As your baby grows the pressure against your stomach increases - this can cause heart burn, eating smaller meals more often will help combat this. Each pregnancy is different, you may feel that you are still happy to exercise or you may be uncomfortable and want to reduce the amount you do. Though you may want to reduce the impact of exercise especially in the latter stages you can still achieve a good workout with less impact

Things to consider when exercising during trimester 2 and 3:

Cardio exercise - to avoid overheating and taking energy away from your baby we propose that you do no more than 30-40 minutes

Running - after the 1st trimester (12 weeks) jogging is preferable to hard running or sprinting. If you are a regular runner then you can continue to do so although we would recommend at 20 weeks you stop running and start brisk walking or a very gentle jog. Although you may feel you can continue longer, running and jumping with the extra weight of your baby will only add additional strain to your pelvic floor and core muscles

Swimming - this is a great exercise throughout your pregnancy. If you have any problems with your pelvis avoid the leg part of the breast stroke (the frog leg movement), to make sure the pubis is not irritated by the movement. Instead, kick you legs in all strokes
Gym

Bike - either upright or recumbent can be used, at the latter stages of your pregnancy you might find both of these uncomfortable if your knees are coming into contact with your tummy. The recumbent will give more back support.

Cross trainer - is good, providing there is no irritation felt in the pubis bone area if you need to reduce the intensity use the legs only or simply use the arm action as an interval section in your workout.

Treadmill - can be used throughout your pregnancy - reduce the intensity as your pregnancy progresses from a run to a jog and jog to walk especially in your third trimester.

Rowing - is a great machine to use as it is low impact and works the upper body as well as the lower, as you get bigger this may become more difficult getting on and off so you may want to eliminate this during your 3rd trimester. Ask a fitness instructor to check that you are maintaining a good posture while rowing.

Aerobic classes - excellent, providing you keep the moves low impact - avoid twists & turns and quick changes of direction (particularly in the latter stages of trimester 2 and in trimester 3).

Circuit training - if you are very fit and a regular to circuit training then you can continue until about 20 weeks. Avoid any activity that may cause you to fall, jumping and high impact moves, exercises lying on your tummy and sit ups.

Boxfit/combat style classes - continue if this is a class you participate in regularly, though you must make several adaptations. Avoid any high impact moves, twists & turns and high kicking. Avoid this type of class after 20 weeks.

Step class - continue to take part in step but now is the time to reduce the height of your step. After 20 weeks avoid fast turns & quick changes, reduce your step height further and pay attention to your technique. You can continue in your third trimester if you are a regular stepper and can still see your step, lower your step further, take breaks if necessary and avoid stepping for more than 45 minutes.

Resistance training - it is fine to continue resistance training, but reduce your original weights and make sure of a good technique at all times to protect the joints.

Free weights/muscle tone classes - are an excellent way of training, particularly as this does not restrict your movement.

Reduce your weights:

- at 12 weeks by at least 5%
- at 20 weeks by a further 5-10% and avoid lifting both arms above the head i.e. shoulder press
- at 30 weeks by another 5-10%, at this stage you may want to reduce your weights by 50% of your original weights

Remember to go with how you feel at this stage:

- at 20 weeks avoid exercises that involve lying on your back or using a barbell behind your neck
- avoid heavy weight lifting as it can encourage you to hold your breath which can cause your blood pressure to rise.
**Abdominal & pelvic floor exercises** - it is beneficial to work the transverse abdominals during pregnancy (the ones running horizontally across your stomach). Ask our health and fitness team to advise you. Exercises that should be avoided are sit ups and crunches in trimester 2. Throughout the day, do your pelvic floor exercises as much as possible. Place reminders on your bathroom door, fridge or beside the kettle etc. Advice on technique can be provided by our teaching team staff or by the physiotherapists at your maternity unit.

**Balance and breathlessness** - your centre of gravity moves due to the baby, so focus on your balance. You may feel your movement is a little clumsier due to your increased size and also feel more breathless as your baby starts to constrict the diaphragm.

**Stretching** - avoid over stretching. Your ligaments and joints are looser due to the hormone relaxin therefore do only maintenance stretching.

**Maintenance stretching** - hold for 10-20 seconds, keep stretching to a comfortable level. Avoid excessive/developmental stretching.

**Stretches to avoid:**
- splits
- hurdle stretch
- crab stretch
- downward dog (unless experienced)
- upward dog
- abdominal stretches
- touching toes standing
- touching toes seated

**Postural exercises** - check your posture regularly. During pregnancy you could be prone to rounding your shoulders & back, due to the extra weight of your baby. To correct your posture, roll the shoulders back and down, sit upright, pulling chin gently in to lengthen the back of your neck. If you sit at a desk, get up and walk around regularly to improve your circulation.

**Pubic area and sacroiliac joint** (lower back) - avoid twisting and turning exercises, fast changes in direction and wide leg movements i.e. big side steps. This will help avoid lower back pain and a condition called symphysis pubis disfunction.

**Clothing** - wear clothing that is both loose and comfortable. Make sure you have a good pair of trainers that feel comfortable and are secure around your ankles.

**Sports bra** - definitely wear a sports bra, you may want to even wear two for some extra support as your bust size increases.

**Avoid the following when pregnant:**
- strenuous exercise in hot/humid weather
- exercise with a high temperature or illness
- exercise on uneven rough ground
- hot tubs and saunas
- contact sports
- racquet sports
- skiing
- water skiing/jet skiing
- surfing
- ice skating
- diving
- horseback riding
- gymnastics
- team sports (basket ball, volleyball etc ...)
**Healthy eating** - eat a healthy, balanced diet during your pregnancy to ensure you feel great, maintain good energy levels and have all the nutrients needed for you and your baby’s development. We recommend you eat small regular meals, plenty of complex carbohydrates (wholemeal breads, potato, pasta, rice and cereals), also aim for your 5-a-day vegetables and fruit, eat good proteins (lean meat, soya, pulses and beans) and healthy fats (olive oil, avocado and linseeds). Eat before exercise and straight after as this keeps both you and your baby fuelled and replaces glucose levels in your muscles.

**Foods to avoid during pregnancy** - there are foods you should avoid completely as they may be potentially harmful to your baby.

**Here is a list of No-No’s!**

- soft and blue veined cheeses - camembert, blue cheese, brie and stilton
- all pate
- raw or partially cooked eggs - watch out for home made mayonnaise, mousses and sauces
- unpasteurised dairy products - goat’s milk or cheese
- raw meats - make sure all meat is cooked thoroughly and is piping hot all the way through with no pink bits!
- raw shellfish, swordfish, shark, marlin - limit your tuna intake to one medium tuna steak or four 140g tins per week.
- alcohol - it’s best to avoid alcohol completely but if you must, limit yourself to 1-2 units a week although even this amount is controversial.
- caffeine - try to limit your caffeine intake to one or 2 cups of tea or coffee a day
- wash all fruit and vegetables before eating!

If you have any more questions about exercise during pregnancy please contact a member of our teaching team who will be glad to help.

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The provided information is not a substitute for medical advice. The advice assumes the mother and baby are in good physical and mental health and without risk factors or complications. The University of Glasgow accepts no liability for injuries or complications that may develop after taking the advice provided here. You should consult with your doctor and midwife before undertaking any exercise and always adhere to their advice.