

## **Exercise Guidelines For Pregnancy and Postpartum**

- Regular exercise (3 times per week) is preferable to intermittent activity. Competitive activities are discouraged. Lap swimming and walking are encouraged.
- Vigorous exercise should not be performed in hot, humid weather or when you have a temperature. Do not allow yourself to become overheated or dehydrated.
- Jerky, bouncy motions should be avoided. Exercise should be done on a wooden floor or tightly carpeted surface to reduce shock and provide a sure footing.
- Deep flexion or extension of joints should be avoided because of connective tissue laxity. Activities that require jumping, jarring motions or rapid changes in direction should be avoided because of joint instability.
- Vigorous exercise should be preceded by a 5-minute period of muscle warm-up. This can be accomplished by slow walking or stationary cycling with low resistance. Strenuous exercise should be avoided. Do not exercise to the point of feeling light headed and profuse sweating.
- Vigorous exercise should be followed by a period of gradually declining activity that includes gentle stationary stretching. Because connective tissue laxity increases the risk of joint injury, stretches should not be taken to the point of maximum resistance. Some form of activity involving the legs such as walking should be continued for a brief period of “cool down” following exercise.
- Care should be taken to gradually rise from the floor to prevent decreased blood pressure.
- Heart rate should be measured at times of peak activity. Target heart rate and limits should be established in consultation with your midwife. Maternal heart rate should not exceed 140 beats per minute. You should still be able to carry on a conversation while exercising.
- Fluids should be taken liberally before, during and after exercise to prevent dehydration. If necessary, activity should be interrupted to replenish fluids.
- Women who have led sedentary lifestyles should begin physical activity at low intensity and advance activity levels very gradually.
- No exercise should be performed while lying flat on your back after the fourth month of pregnancy.

- Exercises that involve holding the breath and bearing down should be avoided.
- Maternal core temp should not exceed 38 degrees C. Dress in layers.
- **KEGELS:** Helps maintain proper tone in the pelvic floor. Poor tone may cause incontinence when laughing or sneezing; discomfort; lack of sensation during intercourse; unusual pain during birth; premature flexion of baby's head; prolonged second stage of labor; damage to the muscle; and feelings of pressure. The more children you have the more you need to do this exercise! There are three ways to do this exercise - try to do each way at least once per week.
  - 200 times per day - (Do them while washing dishes or brushing your teeth, or just before bedtime. But do them faithfully. It is especially helpful to tighten and loosen them during intercourse.)
  - 200 times per day, but hold each one for 3 seconds, then release.
  - 200 times per day, but you must do them in 3 steps. Begin hold, make it tighter, and make it as tight as you can. Then release in 3 steps, loosen slightly, loosen a bit more, completely relax.
- **Tailor Sitting:** This is like sitting Indian style with legs crossed. It encourages the uterus to move forward - increasing circulation and stretching the inner thighs. Begin with short intervals sitting in this manor and gradually increase your time. Sit this way as often as you comfortably can.
- **Squatting:** Squatting gets the body in natural alignment to put pressure on the uterus, to prevent arching of the back (which interferes with pushing), to shorten the birth canal, and to increase the outlet of the pelvis by more than 18%! It generally shortens second stage of labor. It also helps to prepare the leg muscles and is very important in the preparation of the perineum. If you are doing it correctly, it will take you about 10 minutes to do 10 squats, perhaps a bit longer. Follow the time, not the number of times you squat, as you will need to hold the squatting position as long as you comfortably can.
- **Pelvic Tilts:** This exercise probably produces more benefits than any of the others. It tones and conditions the muscles of the lower back and abdominal muscles, it relieves pressure (on lower back, major blood vessels, ureters, and bladder), increases circulation, relieves general tension, and often improves digestion. When done properly, it helps the baby come forward, relieving pressure. Do these exercises often during the day. Remember - even when your belly gets really heavy to keep your back straight. Start by doing 4 sets of 10 daily and work up from there.