

Why exercise during pregnancy?

- Prevent or reduce many symptoms relating to pregnancy, such as back ache, ankle swelling, venous thrombosis, fatigue and varicose veins.
- Prevent excess weight gain and maintain fitness.
- Pregnancy results in an increase in cardiovascular stress, so the fitter you are the easier it is to cope with these demands.
- Increased fitness can lead to an easier labour and a faster recovery after delivery.
- Exercising helps to give you an enhanced feeling of well-being and a positive attitude.

How does pregnancy affect what exercise that I do?

- **Avoid overheating** during pregnancy as this can be harmful to your baby. Your body becomes very efficient at maintaining its core temperature during pregnancy, however you need to use common sense – don't exercise in the heat of the day or in pools over 27 degrees and wear clothing that allows your body to breathe. This is especially important on the first month of your pregnancy when your body hasn't developed the ability to regulate your temperature efficiently.
- During pregnancy, your body produces a hormone called relaxin. This hormone works to soften the ligaments of your body so that your pelvis has more give and flexibility in preparation for giving birth. However this means that during pregnancy **your joints become unstable**, particularly those of your pelvis. It is therefore easy to irritate or injure your joints. If the joints of your pelvis become irritated they can cause you a great deal of discomfort throughout your pregnancy. Avoid exercises which are unsymmetrical and cause torsion or separation of your pelvis. Examples include lunges, high step ups, wide stance squats etc.
- Your heart rate is naturally elevated during pregnancy, therefore it is no longer a good guide of exercise intensity. Instead judge your exercise intensity by how you feel, it is recommended that you exercise at a **comfortable intensity** at which you can maintain a conversation (ie not out of breath). It is not advised that you begin a new exercise regime within the first 3 months of pregnancy.
- Your pelvic floor muscles have to carry an increased load with the weight of your baby, uterus and amniotic fluid. These muscles are also affected by relaxin and become weak and stretched during pregnancy. For this reason it is not advised to participate in high impact exercise as you can further stretch this loose muscle, leading to an increased incidence of incontinence and prolapse later in life. Keep cardiovascular exercise **low impact** to prevent overstretching of your pelvic floor muscles.
- Ensure to do **pelvic floor exercises** at least 3 times a day to maintain strength and tone in these muscles.
- Your abdominals are stretched as your baby and stomach grows. This means that there is reduced support for your spine. At the same time your growing stomach alters your centre of gravity placing increasing loads on your spine. You need to be extra conscious about looking after your back during all exercises.
- As your abdominals stretch, there is a risk of them splitting down the middle. You should **avoid performing sit ups and abdominal crunches** as these can cause this split.
- Your metabolic rate is greatly raised during pregnancy, by the third trimester your metabolic rate at rest is the same as a normal person jogging. Also during pregnancy your body distributes glucose to your baby first, it is therefore really easy for you to become low in blood sugar very quickly. Ensure to **eat before and after exercise** to avoid a drop in blood sugar. Limit high intensity exercise to 20min.
- When you lie on your back during the 2nd and 3rd trimester, your baby can put pressure on your major blood vessels, this can slow the return of blood to your heart and make you feel light headed, unwell and uncomfortable. You should **avoid exercises lying on your back**.