

## The Beginners Guide To Exercise In Pregnancy.

Many women do not find the time to make exercise part of their daily or even weekly routine until their own health is inextricably linked to another-their unborn child. As new research reports the positive effects of exercise during and after pregnancy, the new mum needs to know exactly what these benefits are, what type of exercise and how much she should do.

### **The Benefits**

**Put simply, a little bit of regular exercise could result in a better pregnancy, easier birth and faster recovery.** Exercise may ease or even prevent minor ailments such as cramps and indigestion, as well as major ones such as pre-eclampsia, toxemia and gestational diabetes. It can also help you stay positive about your body and enhance mental wellbeing.

**Many women think it is too late to start an exercise program once they are pregnant. Nothing could be further from the truth.** During pregnancy it is important to look after the abdominal muscles for posture and back care as well as to help during labour. Also, staying active will help to keep you in a healthy weight range.

Exercise will keep the muscles strong and mobile making it easier to carry around the extra body weight of pregnancy - and later a new baby and stroller! Exercise also increases joint stability whilst levels of the relaxin hormone are high safeguarding against injury.

### **What To Do**

Avoid workouts that involve a lot of bouncing, fast movements, physical contact and competition such as jogging, netball, and high impact aerobics and opt for those that are more gentle and controlled or offer some support for the moving body.

**Walking** – an easy and safe option throughout pregnancy although pelvic discomfort may slow you down in the last few weeks before the birth.

**Swimming** – the buoyancy of the water provides support for your larger breasts and bump. Breast stokers should alternate stroke style so the back is not arched for too long, especially if you swim with your head up.

**Aqua Aerobics** – the water lessens impact whilst offering resistance. Join a class or make up your own mini water workout with walking – forwards, backwards, sideways and pushing and pulling the water with your arms in different directions.

**Yoga & Pilates** – look for a specialized pre-natal class or beginner's class and let the instructor know you are pregnant so they can modify movements for you as necessary.

**Supervised resistance training** at home, a park or gym – can be tailored to the individual via the number of exercises, sets, repetitions and amount of resistance and rest. You need a class or trainers assistance to ensure correct technique.

### **Getting Started**

**Variety** – aim for a mixture of cardiovascular, toning, and stretching to achieve 'total fitness' and avoid injury and boredom.

**Enjoy** – choose activities you enjoy so exercise does not become a chore.

**Social** – team up with a friend or join a group. The support and camaraderie amongst expectant and new mums is invaluable.

**Be realistic** – look at your schedule and plan your exercise accordingly. If you try to do too much it will become a stress not an outlet.

### **Keeping Going**

**Progression** – recommendation for exercise in pregnancy is 4 x 45 minutes of moderate exercise per week. **As a new exerciser this is an amount to gradually work up to**, maintain and if necessary taper towards the birth. You could increase each walk by 2 minutes, each swim by 2 laps or each resistance workout by 2 repetitions. Even in a class setting start with 20 minutes and increase by 5 minutes each time if you find it too much.

**Diary** – recording your exercise sessions in a simple diary (see below) enables you to monitor frequency, increases and any changes necessary.

**Safety** – discuss your plan with your medical professional and keep them informed. Stay cool and hydrated. If you feel a little tired or unmotivated do a mini session to keep the habit but if you are really exhausted or sick it is important to rest. Listen to your body and **if anything does not feel right stop and seek advice.**

**Remember with a little bit of regular exercise you could have an easier pregnancy, birth and recovery - and a healthy habit for life!**

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