

## **Fact Or Fiction – Answering Exercise Queries For Mums To Be**

### **Can I do exercises lying on my back?**

Fitness professionals follow the Australian College Of Gynecologist's (ACOG) recommendation that women should not lie flat on their back after the 18<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy due to inhibiting return blood flow. This is a general guideline and women and their pregnancies differ greatly. Many women comfortably lie and even sleep on their back throughout pregnancy, whilst others experience nausea, dizziness, numbness, or a 'not quite right feeling' after only a few minutes. To keep safe:

- Ask your instructor to show you alternative exercises that can be done seated, standing, or lying on your side
- Limit lying on your back to 2-3 minutes
- Roll a small hand towel up into a 'log' and place it under one hip to provide a slight tilt
- Listen to your body and change position if necessary – as women did before ACOG!

### **Should I avoid exercises pushing up above the head?**

Women once lowered the height of their washing lines during pregnancy as an old wives' tale rumoured that movements above the head caused the cord to wrap around the baby's neck. Whilst tragic, this extremely rare condition has nothing to do with the position of your arms. You can safely reach up to get a clean towel from a high cupboard. Overhead exercises should be done with caution for some.

- Directing blood flow above heart level is unadvisable with high blood pressure
- The blood redistribution involved in mixing up lower body and above the head exercises may cause fainting with low blood pressure
- Keep a good posture and do not arch, especially if you have lower back problems

### **I'm more breathless does that mean I have lost my fitness?**

The breathlessness experienced by pregnant women is not due to a sudden loss of fitness, but hormonal and physical changes. An expanding uterus and baby pushing up against the diaphragm creates less space in the chest cavity for air so the body takes more frequent, shallow breaths to compensate. To keep safe remember:

- The heart rate is higher than usual at rest so will also be higher than usual during exercise
- Keep your heart rate to 140-150 beats per minute to ensure your baby does not experience any distress or lack of oxygen
- If you are uncomfortably breathless reduce the intensity or have a rest

### **Are abdominal exercises dangerous?**

Fear of lying on the back, abdominal separation and squashing my baby leads many women to avoid abdominal exercises altogether during pregnancy. Yet, strong abdominals support your bump and assist mobility, protect your back and aid labour and recovery from caesarian. To achieve strong abs safely:

- Avoid traditional movements such as situps
- Ask a personal trainer, yoga/pilates instructor or physio to teach you safe exercises

- Some safe exercises are cat stretch, standing pelvic tilt, 'bumpshift', gentle fitball and core work

### **If there is a danger of overstretching, why would I stretch at all?**

Ideally the hormone relaxin would release a week before birth and only affect the pelvic region. It's release is much earlier and its affect more widespread creating the possibility of overstretching and injury. The loosening affect occurs mostly in the tendons and ligaments around the joints. Muscles still need stretching to prevent them tightening and causing aches and pains. Tips to remember:

- Stretching can minimize neck and back ache and leg cramps
- Stretch in a comfortable position where you will not loose your balance
- Stretch gently not going further than you did prior to pregnancy – think maintaining mobility rather than increasing flexibility!

### **Rachel Livingstone Glowing Expectations**