



Supporting the birth that is right for you!

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Exercise During Pregnancy: Why Should You?

By Rebecca Pugh

Exercise is of vital importance to the pregnant woman. It prevents many of the common discomforts of pregnancy. Increased circulation is one benefit, as it provides oxygenated blood to the extremities and prevents blood pooling. This prevents varicose veins and cramping. The increased blood flow eases muscular aches, tension and ligament pain. Exercise is a great way to prepare for the birth as it loosens the pelvis and tones the surrounding muscles. What you do during pregnancy facilitates healing after the birth as exercise facilitates organ tone and proper repositioning, preventing prolapse of the bladder, uterus, and intestines. Speaking of facilitating healing...why not incorporate Kegel exercises into your exercise routine. This is a gentle contraction and relaxation of the perineal muscles. By exercising this area you increase blood flow and muscular tone in the area which facilitate healing post-partum. Kegels reduce recovery time after birth! You will also be learning how to relax the perineum, an important factor in birthing. We recommend doing 3 sets of 20 kegels during the course of a day. Do them in the car or while watching a movie. It's easy! Through exercise muscles are toned internally and externally, the organs function better, this can even relieve constipation. In general, exercise elevates your mood and prevents depression, especially if you choose an outdoor activity. You may choose a specific pregnancy oriented form of exercise, such as pre-natal yoga, that is designed to promote a smooth birth, teaching breathing and relaxation techniques as well. Yoga and stretching are excellent ways to relieve the discomforts of pregnancy such as an aching back or psiatric pain. Find a teacher who is used to dealing with pregnancy. We develop body awareness through exercise by tuning into our own needs. A good rule to follow is that if you did it before pregnancy, you can do it during pregnancy. Pregnancy is not a good time to take up a new form of exercise that you have never tried before. Another tip is to avoid high impact exercise, like running, or anything that causes strain, like weight lifting. If you are used to being active before you became pregnant stay active, but adjust your activity level to accommodate your growing size and nutritional needs. You never want to burn more calories exercising than you are ingesting. That is a diet and pregnant women should not diet. If you were not active before pregnancy we recommend taking up walking. It is the ideal form of exercise for pregnancy as it tones the pelvis, increases cardiovascular well being, and gets you out in the fresh air. Try a short walk of 20-30 minutes 3 times a week to start. You may find it makes you feel great and you will walk more.



If you would like more information on exercise in pregnancy try Aviva Rohm's book [The Natural Pregnancy](#), or search The Yoga Journal website for The Living Arts video series of Yoga for Pregnancy, or try your local YWCA for indoor exercise. Otherwise, get out there and hit the trail!