



Active for **TWO**

Physical
Activity During
and After
Pregnancy



introduction

Are you pregnant or planning to conceive? Then this is your opportunity to review your lifestyle habits. You already know that physical activity is good for your health, but what about during pregnancy or after you give birth? Should you stop playing sports? Is there a safe way to exercise that would be more beneficial to you and your baby? You are right to ask yourself what role physical activity plays during pregnancy. Below you will find answers to many of your questions as well as exercises for expecting and new mothers.

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Being active is good for everyone!

People who regularly do exercises that get their hearts and lungs pumping, warm their muscles up a little and stretch their bodies:

- ▶ have more energy
- ▶ are in better physical and mental health
- ▶ deal with stress more easily
- ▶ sleep better
- ▶ have less difficulty keeping their weight under control
- ▶ participate more easily in recreational activities and those associated with daily life

We now know that being physically active reduces the risk of developing the health problems that, unfortunately, affect a large proportion of the adult population. These include heart diseases such as high blood pressure, as well as diabetes, being overweight, obesity, certain types of cancer (breast and colon), depression, osteoarthritis and arthritis.

According to the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology:

- ▶ Exercise does not increase the risk of miscarriage or neonatal complications.
- ▶ Starting pelvic floor* exercises shortly after delivery may reduce the risk of future urinary incontinence.
- ▶ Doing moderate exercise while you are nursing does not affect the quantity or composition of breast milk or your child's growth.

Source: www.sogc.org/guidelines/public/129E-JCPG-June2003.pdf

* The pelvic floor is made up of several layers of muscle that stretch between your legs. These muscles may become slackened and weak with the added weight and pressure of pregnancy and childbirth. They should not be neglected as they play an important role in supporting pelvic organs, controlling the bladder and bowel and improving vaginal tone. To find the correct muscles to contract, pretend you are stopping or slowing the flow of urine without using the muscles of your abdomen, legs or buttocks. See page 22 for exercises on how to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.

physical activity during pregnancy




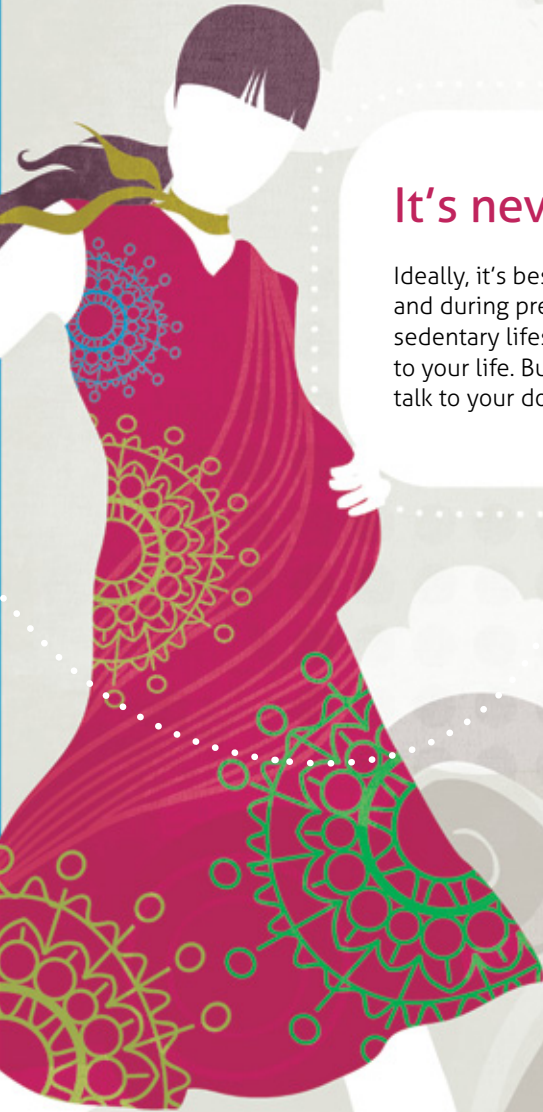
Changing times

If your grandmother took part in sports or other physical activities before becoming pregnant, she was likely advised to “take it easy” while pregnant. Nowadays, medical authorities know that inactivity is what pregnant women should worry about—not physical exercise!

Beware of inactivity

Here are a few problems pregnant women expose themselves to if they don't exercise:

- ▶ physical deterioration, including greater shortness of breath; less muscular strength and endurance; less flexibility, agility and balance; uncomfortable posture, etc.
 - ▶ more intense fatigue
 - ▶ excessive weight gain, especially in the third trimester of pregnancy
 - ▶ increased risk of:
 - gestational diabetes
 - hypertension
 - preeclampsia (convulsions harmful to the baby that can occur during the third trimester)
 - backache
 - ▶ greater difficulty in recovering from childbirth
- 



It's never too late

Ideally, it's best to be physically active both before and during pregnancy. But even if you lead a more sedentary lifestyle, it's not too late to add more activity to your life. But, before starting any exercise program, talk to your doctor¹ or midwife².

- 1 Your doctor may advise against doing certain types of physical activity if you have 1) health problems, including cardiovascular disease (e.g. hypertension), restrictive lung disease, chronic bronchitis, extreme obesity, serious orthopedic problems or anemia; or 2) pregnancy-related problems, including cervical incompetence, a history of premature labour or low birth weight delivery, premature rupture of membranes, persistent second or third trimester bleeding, intrauterine growth restriction or preeclampsia.
- 2 A midwife is a health professional offering care to women during pregnancy, labour and birth as well as follow-up with mothers and babies for a maximum of six weeks after the birth.



Your physical exercise program

If you are already active, continue doing the activities you enjoy, as long as you run little risk of losing your balance, falling down or getting hit in the stomach. If you aren't very active, begin slowly and build up gradually—start with low-intensity exercises and wait until the second trimester of your pregnancy before undertaking activities that require more energy. You can start a training program by:

- joining a group
- asking a kinesiologist³ to design a personalized program for you
- watching a workout DVD specially designed for pregnant women
- designing your own training program by following the recommendations below

³ Kinesiologists are health professionals, specialists in physical activity, who use movement for prevention, treatment and performance optimization purposes. For information on services offered by kinesiologists, visit the Fédération des kinésiologues du Québec Web site at www.kinesiologue.com.

Get your heart pumping

If your pregnancy is progressing normally, take part in activities that increase your heart rate yet leave you only mildly out of breath (i.e. you should never be so out of breath that you aren't able to whistle, breathe only through your nose or talk, for example). By doing regular exercise that works your cardiovascular system, you will:

- maintain or improve your aerobic fitness (you will be less out of breath)
- increase the placenta's capacity to transfer oxygen
- run a lower risk of retaining water

Safe cardiovascular exercises

Here are some cardiovascular exercises that burn a significant number of calories and improve your aerobic fitness:

- brisk walking
- cycling
- riding a stationary bike alone or in a group (spinning)
- swimming
- aquafitness
- low-impact aerobic dance and its variations
- cross-country skiing (easy to moderate difficulty)
- snowshoeing
- exercising on a stepper, an elliptical trainer or any other cardiorespiratory training machine at home or at a fitness centre

Jogging is another aerobic activity suitable for the first two trimesters of pregnancy, as long as you jogged on a regular basis prior to pregnancy.

Activities not recommended during pregnancy include basketball, horseback riding, gymnastics, hockey, scuba diving, high-altitude sports (over 2 500 meters), downhill skiing, soccer, racket sports, mountain biking on difficult trails, and, of course, combat sports.

Strengthen your muscles and increase your flexibility

By regularly doing strength training exercises, you will:

- improve your posture
- reduce the risk of lower back pain and urinary incontinence
- resume everyday tasks that require strength and endurance more easily after childbirth

Pages 20 to 30 contain strength training and stretching exercises that require very little equipment.

Be diligent

Throughout your pregnancy, depending on what your condition permits, you should exercise as much as you can. For example, you might be interested in doing around 30 minutes of moderate-intensity cardiovascular exercise one to four times per week, and about 20 to 30 minutes of strength training and stretching one to three times per week. In the third trimester, you can maintain or reduce the frequency and intensity of your training sessions based on your condition.

However, nothing prevents you from exercising more often or longer if you feel up to it. What matters is that you take part in a variety of activities, that you don't overexert yourself and that you take appropriate precautions. Discuss this with your doctor or midwife at every appointment.

Great gift ideas for active mothers-to-be!

- > Baby carriers for walking, hiking or snowshoeing (front carrier, baby backpack, baby sling, etc.)
- > Bike trailer
- > Jogging stroller with brake
- > Children's sled
- > Glider harness for cross-country skiing

These allow you to keep active without having to hire a sitter.



Precautions

Physical activity does not increase the risk of health problems associated with pregnancy, difficult childbirth or health problems for the baby. However, like anyone who exercises, you must take appropriate precautions for your fitness level, age, etc.

Avoid high intensity exercise

Monitor the intensity and duration of your cardiovascular workouts. Your goal is to stay in good physical shape throughout your pregnancy—not break sports records. Avoid gruelling sessions and intense training. Do not exercise vigorously two days in a row. And, if you take part in competitive sports, it would be wise to stop competing during pregnancy.

Avoid overexertion

Because the fetus requires energy, physical activities may seem more difficult during pregnancy. Activities that seemed easy before now require a little more effort. During pregnancy, your heart beats faster and your blood pressure increases slightly. Always listen to your body to find the level of intensity that doesn't overexert you. In the last trimester, breathing may become more difficult as the baby pushes up against your diaphragm, so adjust the level of your workout accordingly.

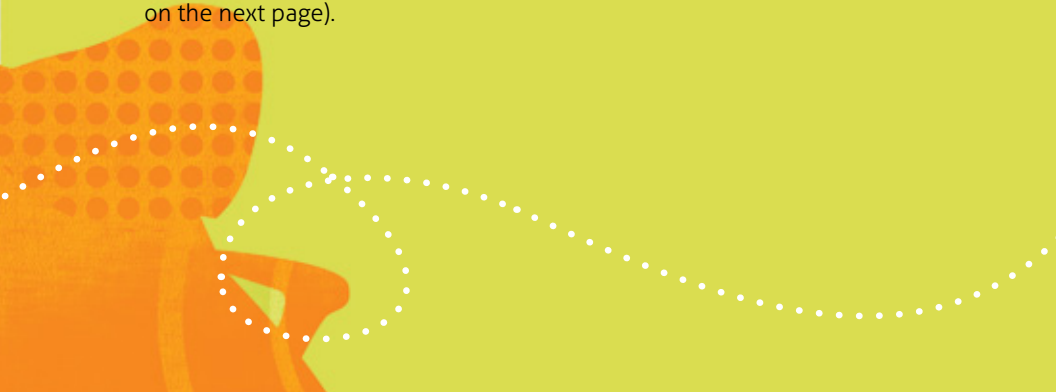
If an exercise seems too difficult for you, stop, and then continue at a lower intensity. To gauge how strenuously you are exercising, use the "talk test" or the scale of perceived exertion. Let's look at this more closely.

Talk test

A moderate workout intensity means you are slightly out of breath but still able to hold a conversation. If you are breathless as you talk, decrease the pace and intensity of your workout.

Scale of perceived exertion

During pregnancy, most women should stay within the 12-14 range. Exercising above level 14 is not recommended. (See the Borg scale of perceived exertion on the next page).



Borg scale of perceived exertion

6	
7	very, very light
8	
9	somewhat light
10	
11	fairly light
12	
13	somewhat hard
14	
15	hard
16	
17	very hard
18	
19	very, very hard
20	



Acceptable level for most pregnant women

Source: www.sogco.org/guidelines/public/129E-1JPC-1-June2003.pdf



Avoid getting too hot and becoming dehydrated

If it's hot, lower the intensity level of your activity to avoid getting too hot and perspiring too much. Wear loose-fitting, breathable clothing. In summer, exercise in a cool or air-conditioned location whenever possible.

When outside, stay out of the sun. Drink small amounts of water or fruit juice right before, during and immediately after exercising, taking about 250 to 300 ml every half-hour.

In case of problems, stop the activity and consult your doctor or midwife

Stop exercising and contact your doctor or midwife if you experience any of the following symptoms (although rare): nausea; dizziness; sudden change in body temperature; vaginal bleeding; blurred vision; shortness of breath; a racing heart rate that persists after exercise; fainting; a sharp pain in the pubis, back, abdomen or chest; or pain similar to uterine contractions.

Watch out for joint injuries

Throughout pregnancy, your hormones change to prepare your body for childbirth, loosening your joints and thus making you more susceptible to injury. As you get closer to term:

- ▶ do fewer movements that involve extensive stretching
- ▶ opt for activities that involve little risk of sprains (e.g. walk on a gravel path instead of hiking on uneven ground, or ride a stationary bike instead of going mountain biking)
- ▶ during strength training, use lighter weights and compensate by increasing the number of repetitions, if you wish

Avoid lying on your back for long periods of time

Starting in the fourth month of pregnancy, lie down on your side to avoid dizzy spells.

Do not hold your breath

As you may have noticed, we tend to hold our breath when lifting heavy objects. This should be avoided, especially during pregnancy, as it increases blood pressure. Breathe normally when doing strength training exercises.

physical activity After childbirth

Get back into shape

After giving birth, many women want to feel lighter and are eager to “get their body back.” It is possible to do so, by combining a healthy, balanced and varied diet with regular physical activity.

Boost your energy levels and self-esteem

Some mothers feel they have to stop exercising to take care of their baby. But being physically active is important—not only for you but for your baby too. Think of your workouts as a date with yourself and as a gift to your child.



Why start exercising as soon as possible?

Start exercising as soon as possible because regular physical exercise during the postpartum period, unless contraindicated by your doctor or midwife, offers many physical and emotional benefits, which include:

- alleviating general fatigue and raising your energy level
- increasing muscle strength and endurance (particularly muscles that were stretched during pregnancy) and improving aerobic fitness
- reducing the risk of postpartum depression and alleviating its symptoms
- improving glucose (sugar) tolerance, in cases of gestational diabetes
- reducing feelings of isolation and providing opportunities for socializing, especially during postnatal classes
- helping you and your family adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle
- helping you return to your pre-pregnancy weight
- helping you feel better about your body and appearance
- improving your sexual relations
- relieving stress and helping you manage your emotions and energy better, making you feel calmer as you care for your baby and interact with other family members

It's never too late!

Returning to sports and regular physical activity will be easier if you were active during pregnancy. However, it's never too late for new moms to get moving. Just start slowly and gradually increase the duration and intensity of your workout.

Your physical exercise program

Check with your doctor or midwife to determine when you can start getting back to a regular exercise or sports routine. Depending on your condition and the type of delivery you had, you may need to wait anywhere from several days to up to eight weeks or more before starting an exercise program. In fact, it may take several days or weeks to recover from lacerations, an episiotomy, diastasis or a cesarean section.

Wait until you feel ready, take into account your level of energy and adapt your exercise routine to your level of discomfort. Listen to your body.

Get your heart pumping

Find cardiovascular activities you can do with your baby, alone, as a family or in a group (e.g. walking, jogging, taking cardio-stroller or aqua-mom classes, cycling, cross-country skiing). Choose activities that give your heart and lungs a suitable workout.

Depending on your ability, try to exercise as often as possible. Start with five-minute outings and gradually increase their frequency, duration and intensity. Keep in mind that a little bit of exercise each day is better than none, although more is always better. Whatever the length or intensity of your workouts, you will always benefit from exercise.

Strengthen your muscles and improve your flexibility

By doing strength training exercises, you can:

- > hasten your recovery after you give birth
- > improve your posture
- > reduce the risk of lower back pain and urinary incontinence
- > increase your muscle mass, and since muscle burns more energy than fat, even at rest, you will burn more energy every day and control your weight more easily

Pages 20 to 30 contain strength training and stretching exercises that require very little equipment. The pamphlet *Exercise and Have Fun!*⁴ also contains strength training exercises you can do with your baby... as a weight!

Tips for staying motivated

Returning to physical activity after delivery is beneficial as long as you work out frequently and regularly. So what's the secret? Find activities you enjoy doing.

Many things can get in the way of your exercise routine: lack of sleep, caring for a new baby, household chores, feeling overwhelmed by new responsibilities, not to mention lack of motivation. Here are some tips to help you stick with it:

- ▶ Set *realistic goals* and reward yourself when you meet them.
- ▶ Take time to plan *when, where, how* and *with whom* you will do each activity.
- ▶ When someone you trust takes care of your baby, take advantage of it... and get moving!
- ▶ Find out about:
 - *programs and services offered* by your municipality or in fitness centres (stroller or aqua fitness classes, walking clubs, on-site daycare, etc.)
 - where you can *rent equipment* for certain sports or activities (e.g. baby carrier, bike trailer, children's sled)
- ▶ Keep at it and exercise regularly! When something unexpected comes up, have a *plan B* and do everything you can not to cancel your workout (e.g. change your schedule, shorten your workout). Having a routine is important to staying motivated.
- ▶ Don't get discouraged! When considering putting off exercise, *think of its benefits* and keep in mind that "tomorrow is another day."

For a successful outing with baby!

Before heading outdoors to exercise, ensure your and your baby's wellbeing by:

- ▶ packing plenty of water and snacks
- ▶ dressing appropriately
- ▶ using sunscreen or chilblain prevention cream, depending on the season
- ▶ wearing a sun hat or cap
- ▶ and... going to the bathroom before you leave the house

Precautions and specific conditions

Whether you exercise alone or with your baby, you must do so safely. Because your body has undergone major physiological changes during pregnancy and childbirth, you must take certain precautions when choosing physical and sports activities.

Avoid extreme ranges of motion

After you give birth, your joints will remain somewhat slacked for some time. Be careful when doing cardiovascular and strength training exercises and avoid movements that might involve hyperextensions.

Keep those abs engaged!

Start off any exercise (cardiovascular or strength training) by contracting your stomach muscles. Try pulling your bellybutton up into your spine to help protect your back.

Ease into it

Take into account how much sleep you are getting and adjust the type, duration and intensity of your workout and sports sessions accordingly. Remember, what is important is to establish a routine that will keep you motivated. Being active just a few more minutes each day can be beneficial.

Breastfeeding

If you breastfeed, plan to exercise after nursing when your breasts won't be so full. Wear a good supportive bra that doesn't constrict your breasts.

Drink plenty of water

Make sure you drink plenty of water before and during your workout.



A FEW QUESTIONS

Will exercising during pregnancy affect the development of the fetus?

No. Despite persistent misconceptions, we now know that cardiovascular and strength training exercise does not increase the risk of miscarriage or slow fetal growth. In fact, some studies indicate that women who are physically active during pregnancy have babies who:

- ▶ can better tolerate the physiological stress of birth
- ▶ have a slightly lower percentage of body fat up to age five
- ▶ have significantly higher motor skills at age one
- ▶ display higher intellectual abilities at age five

Can I improve my fitness level while I'm pregnant?

Yes. Regular physical activity during pregnancy prevents a decrease in, and may even improve, aerobic fitness, muscle strength and endurance, and flexibility.

Will exercising while I'm pregnant help me gain less weight?

Yes, particularly in the third trimester. Engaging in regular calorie-burning

physical activity throughout your pregnancy will not necessarily affect your weight in the first two trimesters, but it will help you gain less weight in the last trimester. It will also decrease the risk of developing gestational diabetes. This complication—the most common among pregnant women—is associated with a number of problems for the mother and a higher risk of health problems for the baby. And, by the way, the better shape you're in, the easier it will be to deal with your temporary weight gain.

Will my delivery be easier if I'm physically active while pregnant?

Possibly, but not necessarily. Being physically fit is a valuable asset in all kinds of circumstances. But many factors can affect the delivery process: the size of the baby, the mother's body type (e.g. pelvis size), tissue elasticity, the number of hours of labour, the mother's ability to relax, and so on. We cannot say with certainty that being physically fit will make delivery easier.

Nevertheless, it appears that women who are active during pregnancy are significantly less

likely to undergo cesarean sections or experience premature labour, delivery complications, signs of fetal distress and neonatal complications. One thing is certain—staying active improves your endurance (which you'll need during labour) and helps you recover more quickly.

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Can exercise help me deal with postpartum depression?

Yes. On top of the physical benefits, exercise provides all kinds of psychological benefits, notably a lower risk of postpartum depression and fewer depressive symptoms. And the time you devote to physical activity can be a special opportunity for you to recharge your batteries.

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Will exercising while I'm pregnant help me return to my normal weight more quickly?

Yes. Regularly engaging in calorie-burning aerobic activity will make it easier for you to return to your pre-pregnancy weight. Studies show that, in general, women who are still 5 kg heavier one year after giving birth are not very active and that roughly 25% of those who 10 kg are heavier are physically inactive. Remember, however, that losing weight too quickly, that is, more than 0.5 kg a week, can put your health at risk.

Will I be up and about more quickly after giving birth if I exercise during pregnancy?

Yes. Better aerobic fitness will allow you to recover more quickly and resume enough physical activity to return to your normal size. Furthermore, regular physical activity reduces the side effects of physical changes associated with pregnancy and childbirth, such as weaker back, stomach, perineum and chest muscles; urinary incontinence; joint weakness and hormonal changes.

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Will exercise change my breast milk?

No. A nursing mother can engage in low- to medium-intensity activity without any effect on the amount or composition of her milk (and thus without any negative effect on her newborn's growth).

conclusion

You should stay physically active during and after your pregnancy. You don't need to run a marathon or spend hours at the gym—a few simple exercises will help you stay active during this period. The key to success is to:

- ▶ take into account your abilities and level of energy and ease into it
- ▶ take part in a variety of activities that you enjoy and make you feel good
- ▶ plan workouts that fit into your schedule
- ▶ stick with it to stay motivated

Remember, a little bit of exercise every day is better than none and provides a wealth of benefits.





exercises

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Mat
- Chair
- Light weights
(cans or plastic bottles filled with sand or water work just fine)

Strength training and stretching exercises to do during and after pregnancy

Your strength training and stretching exercises round out your cardiovascular routine. The following pages provide some examples of exercises to get you started.

Your workout session should:

- ▶ begin with a short 5 to 10-minute warm-up of cardiovascular exercise (e.g. walk on the spot, do some low-impact dance moves, go up and down the stairs, march on the spot by raising your legs and keeping your arms high and straight).
- ▶ include strength training and stretching exercises. You could, for example, do these for 20 to 30 minutes, or even longer if you are able.
- ▶ end with 5 minutes of relaxation.

The exercises have been divided into the major muscle groups of the body. Try to choose exercises from different muscle groups and vary them from one workout to another. Do as many as possible every week, depending on your abilities.

Initially, your routine could include **2 or 3 sets of 10 to 15 repetitions** for most exercises. If you have difficulty doing 10 repetitions, do as many as you can. You will probably be able to increase the number of repetitions as you build strength. **Depending on the exercise, alternate sides after each set.**

A good way to progress is to start increasing the number of repetitions per set (e.g. instead of 2 sets of 10 repetitions, do 2 sets of 12 repetitions). Then, add a set but decrease the number of repetitions slightly (e.g. instead of 2 sets of 12 repetitions, do 3 sets of 8 repetitions). After that, you can increase the number of repetitions per set once again. Don't forget; increase the amount of weight gradually!

ready? Action!

Must-do strength training exercises

The following strength training exercises should be done several times a day throughout your pregnancy. Start them up again as soon as possible after delivery, depending on your level of discomfort (if you feel persistent pain, stop, and then try again a few days later).

Pelvic floor* or Kegel exercise

Starting position: Sitting on a chair, bench or floor.

Movement: Squeeze the muscles of the pelvic floor, hold the squeeze for 10 seconds, and then release for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times, several times a day.

Variation: You can also tighten your muscles gradually in a pyramid fashion. Imagine you are on an elevator travelling up and down five floors. At each floor, tighten your muscles a little until you reach the top. On the way down, release the muscles slightly floor by floor. Gradually increase the number of floors.

Transverse abdominals (core muscles associated with a flat stomach)

Starting position: On your hands and knees or in any other position.

Movement: Try to pull your bellybutton in towards your spine and up towards your head while keeping your back straight. Hold this position for 10 seconds and release. Repeat 10 times.

Pelvic tilt

Starting position: Standing with your back against a wall, knees slightly bent.

Movement: Tilt your hips forward by contracting your abdominal muscles, pressing your lower back against the wall. Hold this position for 10 seconds and release. Repeat 10 times.

“J” breathing

Starting position: Standing, sitting or lying on your side.

Movement: As you exhale, gently tighten your abs while pulling your bellybutton in and up in the shape of a “J”. Release and repeat 10 times.

* The pelvic floor is made up of several layers of muscle that stretch between your legs. These muscles may become slackened and weak with the added weight and pressure of pregnancy and childbirth. They should not be neglected as they play an important role in supporting pelvic organs, controlling the bladder and bowel and improving vaginal tone. To find the correct muscles to contract, pretend you are stopping or slowing the flow of urine without using the muscles of your abdomen, legs or buttocks.

Regular strength training exercises

Before starting regular strength training exercises after you give birth, consult your doctor or midwife to make sure more intense exercise is not contraindicated.

LEGS AND BUTTOCKS



Exercise 1

Starting position: Standing with your back straight, one hand on the back of a chair for support.

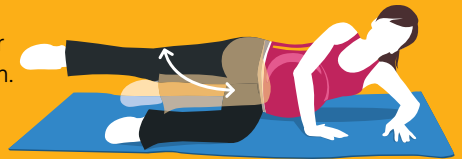
Movement: Extend one leg out to the side and rotate it forward and then backward. Keep the supporting leg slightly bent.

Variation: Pretend you are writing your child's name and age in the air with your foot.

Exercise 2

Starting position: Lying on your side, propped up on your elbow, with your back against a wall, one hand in front of you on the floor for balance, bend your bottom leg at 90° and extend the top leg out in front.

Movement: Lift the top leg and lower it. Then bring your knee in toward your chest and return to your initial position. Keep your lower back against the wall throughout the exercise.



Exercise 3

Starting position: Standing with your feet apart, back straight, one hand on the back of a chair for support, the other arm extended to the side with your hand relaxed.

Movement: Bend and straighten your knees slightly, lifting your heels as you do so (like a ballerina).

Regular strength training exercises (continued)

ABDOMINALS

Exercise 1 >

Starting position: On your hands and knees, with your back flat.

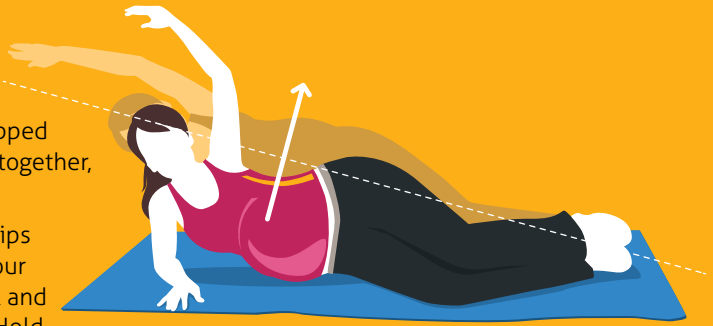
Movement: Tighten your abdominals and bring your right knee in toward your right shoulder.



Exercise 2 >

Starting position: Lying on your side, propped up on your elbow, legs together, knees slightly bent.

Movement: Lift your hips off the floor, keeping your knees, hips, upper back and head in a straight line. Hold the position for a few seconds and lower hips back down.



Variation: To increase the level of difficulty, keep your knees straight and support yourself on your elbow and feet. As you lift your hips, keep your entire body aligned from head to toe.

Exercise 3 >

Starting position: Lying on your side, propped up on your elbow, with your back against a wall, legs together, one hand in front of you on the floor for balance.

Movement: Keeping your legs together, lift your legs as high as you can, making sure your knees, buttocks and hips are in a straight line. Keep your lower back against the wall at all times. Hold the position for a few seconds and lower your legs.



Exercise 4 >

Starting position: Standing, feet slightly wider than hip-width apart, knees slightly bent, back straight, hands on hips.

Movement: Tighten your abdominals, then swing one hip out and up. Hold for a few seconds and return to your starting position.

Variation: This exercise can also be done sitting down.



Exercise 5 >

Starting position: On your knees, with your hands by your sides.

Movement: Tighten your abdominals, lean back about 35°. Maintain the position for a few seconds and then return to the starting position. Be careful not to arch your back.

Variation: To increase the level of difficulty, lift your arms in front of you as you lean back.



Regular strength training exercises (continued)

ARMS AND SHOULDERS

Exercise 1

Starting position: Standing with your feet slightly apart, one weight in each hand, arms slightly bent.

Movement: Slowly lift the weights out to the sides until your arms are parallel to the ground.



Exercise 2

Starting position: Standing with your feet slightly apart, one weight in each hand, elbows tucked into your sides and bent at a 90° angle, palms facing up.

Movement: Bring your weights slowly to your shoulders and then back down. Make sure your arms are not completely straight when you lower your weights.

Exercise 3

Starting position: Standing at arm's length from a wall, place both hands on the wall at shoulder level, shoulder width apart.

Movement: Bend your arms and slowly lean forward until your nose is almost touching the wall and then return to your starting position. Keep your back straight throughout the exercise.

Variation: Vary the distance between your hands to work different muscles. The wider apart your hands are, the more you use your pectoral muscles; the closer together, the more you use your triceps.





Exercise 1 ▲

Starting position: On your hands and knees, with your back flat, feet pointed.

Movement: Extend one leg back and lift it up and down, tightening the buttocks. Be careful not to raise your leg above your back.

Variation: Move your leg from side to side: extend one leg back and out at a 45° angle.



Exercise 2 ▲

Starting position: On your hands and knees, with your back flat.

Movement: Extend one leg back and the opposite arm in front to form a straight line. While keeping your abdominals tight, bring your knee in toward the opposite elbow until they touch. Be careful not to lift your leg above your back.

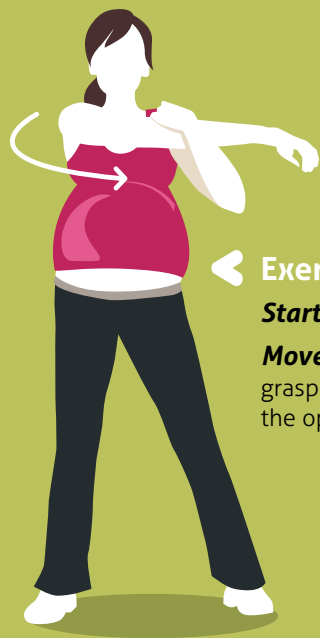
Stretching exercises

Hold each stretch for 4 or 5 slow, deep breaths. Where applicable, repeat the exercise with the opposite arm or leg.

Exercise 1 >

Starting position: Standing or sitting.

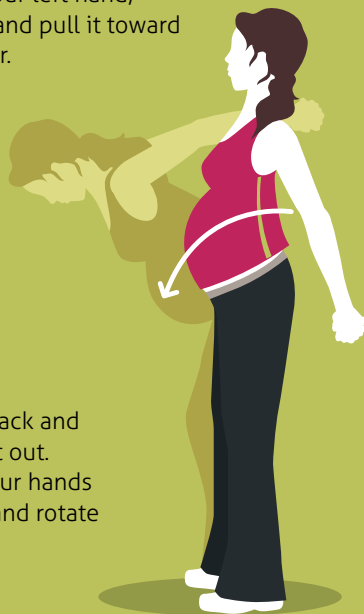
Movement: Tilt your head and upper body slightly to one side until you feel the stretch along the neck and shoulder.



< Exercise 2

Starting position: Standing or sitting.

Movement: Using your left hand, grasp your right arm and pull it toward the opposite shoulder.



Exercise 3 >

Starting position: Standing or sitting.

Movement: Clasp your hands behind your back and extend your elbows while pushing your chest out. Press your chest forward slightly and raise your hands toward the ceiling. Bend your knees slightly and rotate your pelvis.



◀ Exercise 4

Starting position: Standing or sitting, one arm raised above your head.

Movement: Reach up and over to the side without twisting your shoulders or hips to stretch the side of your torso.

Exercise 5 ▶

Starting position: Standing with your hands against a wall, place your weight on one leg while keeping the other leg relaxed and knee slightly bent.

Movement: Lean forward to stretch the calf muscle of your back leg while keeping that foot flat on the ground.



Exercise 6 ▶

Starting position: Sitting on the floor with your back straight, right leg extended in front and left knee bent.

Movement: Slowly lean forward to stretch the back of the right thigh.



Stretching exercises (continued)

Exercise 7 >

Starting position: Sitting on the floor with your back straight, knees bent and soles of your feet together.

Movement: Grip both feet and let your knees slowly drop to the sides, stretching your inner thighs.



Exercise 8 >

Starting position: On your hands and knees.


Movement: Arch your back to stretch it, like a cat.



Relaxation exercises

End your workout by taking a few minutes to relax. Sitting with your legs crossed and back straight, concentrate on your breathing and try to slow it down. If possible, inhale for four seconds and exhale for six.



An illustration of a pregnant woman in a red tank top and a child in a red shirt and patterned skirt walking in a park. The woman is holding a blue water bottle. The background is green with stylized trees and a dotted line path.

Don't forget, it's never too late to get moving. Take advantage of this time in your life to discover or rediscover the pleasure of exercise and ask other members of your family to join you in adopting and maintaining a physically active lifestyle.

Get active... for life!

Active <<
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