

Exercising for two

Personal trainer Will Kwatia offers some gentle exercise routines to keep you fit during pregnancy



Zefa

Regular exercise during pregnancy helps your body by keeping your heart strong and your muscles in shape. It can also relieve the basic discomforts of pregnancy, such as morning sickness, constipation and aching legs and back.

Being active can also improve your self-image and make you sleep more soundly. If you normally have a moderate exercise routine, keep it up. If you've been pretty sedentary, do not plunge suddenly into a strenuous programme.

SAFETY FIRST

It is always important to let your doctor or midwife know if you plan to continue your usual exercise routine during pregnancy or if you are starting a new routine and are new to exercising. Here are some simple guidelines to follow that will help to ensure the safety and well-being of you and your baby:

- If you have been following a regular exercise programme prior to your pregnancy, you should be able to maintain that programme to some degree throughout your pregnancy.
- If you are just starting an exercise programme you should start very slowly and be careful not to over-exert yourself. Always ask for guidance.
- Listen to your body. It will tell you when it is time to reduce the level of exercise.
- Never exercise to the point of exhaustion or breathlessness.
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes

that give good cushioning and support.

- Take frequent breaks and make sure you drink plenty of fluids.
 - Avoid exercising in hot conditions.
 - Contact sports should be avoided.
 - Use proper techniques when weight training and avoid lifting weights that are too heavy.
 - Eat a healthy and balanced diet. If you exercise regularly you will need to maintain high energy levels, so make sure you have healthy snacks to hand.
 - Exercise should be regular, but allow your body to recover and rest properly between routines.
 - Avoid rigorous bouncing.
 - Do not hold your breath at any time during exercising.
- Stop exercising immediately and talk to your doctor if you experience any of the following symptoms:
- Vaginal bleeding
 - Rapid heartbeat
 - Dizziness or feeling faint
 - Any significant pain.

WHY EXERCISE?

THE BENEFITS OF A REGULAR ROUTINE WHILE YOU ARE PREGNANT INCLUDE:

- Improved posture
- Relief of back pain
- Strengthened muscles
- Enhanced circulation
- Increased flexibility
- Increased stamina
- Increased energy levels
- Reduced constipation
- Decreased muscle tension
- Improved weight management
- Positive self-image
- Quicker return to previous shape after pregnancy



SIMPLE EXERCISES

So what exercises are appropriate during pregnancy? Try these suggestions.

PELVIC TILT

- Kneel on all fours on a padded surface, making sure that your back is straight and parallel to the floor.
- Inhale, then, as you exhale, curve your lower back up towards your belly button and slowly pull your belly button in towards your spine.
- As you inhale again, slowly stretch out your back to the start position.

Benefits: The pelvic tilt will help strengthen the abdominal muscles, relieve

back pain and help to improve posture. Make sure you do the pulling-in movement correctly. Don't just suck in your stomach – you should be able to feel your abdominal muscles contracting gently.

LEG LIFT

- Lie on your side with your bottom leg slightly bent up towards your chest. Rest your head on your arm and make sure you are relaxed.
- As you breathe out, lift your top leg up and slightly back with your toes pointing towards you.
- Keep your belly button pulled in towards the spine as in the pelvic tilt (see above) and gently squeeze your buttocks together.
- Lower the leg slowly and repeat.

Benefits: This exercise will help strengthen and firm the muscles around your hips and also your buttock muscles.

Precautions: If either leg hurts on lifting or you have sciatica, do not attempt this exercise.

NECK ROLL

- Sit with your legs crossed or, if you find this is uncomfortable, with your legs stretched out in front of you.
- Tip your chin downwards toward your chest, then bring it around as if you were looking over one shoulder.
- Hold for a moment then roll the chin down across your chest until you are looking over the other shoulder.
- Inhale as you look over your shoulder and exhale as you move your chin across your chest.
- Keep the belly button pulled in.

Benefits: Neck rolls help to relax tight neck muscles, decrease upper back pain and help to improve posture.

Precautions: Do not tip your head back or circle your neck too far around as this may cause stress on the joints and nerves in the back of the neck.

SHOULDER CIRCLE

- Sit in the same position as in the neck rolls (see above).
- With your back straight and relaxed, inhale and slowly bring your shoulders forward to the front.
- Then slowly move your shoulders up towards your ears.
- As you exhale, slowly rotate your shoulders back so that your shoulder blades come together.
- Lower your shoulders back to the starting position and repeat in the opposite direction.

Benefits: This exercise relaxes the muscles in the upper back and stretches the muscles that support the breasts. By opening up the chest ▶

Gentle stretching helps to improve your posture and breathing

Always ask for guidance if you find a position uncomfortable



Aquanatal classes are a wonderful way to relax and exercise

cavity, this routine helps deepen breathing and improve posture.

Precautions: Try not to strain when doing this exercise; make sure the movements are slow and controlled.

OTHER OPTIONS

AEROBICS Choose low-impact classes over high-impact ones. Always tell your instructor you are pregnant and stop exercise when your body tells you.

CYCLING This is okay in moderation, but remember that your balance may be affected as your pregnancy progresses.

DANCING A great option so long as you do not do any jerky movements or lose your balance. Again, listen to your body and take it gently.

AQUANATAL This can be very relaxing as the feeling of weightlessness in the water supports your body weight. Some fitness or leisure centres have

special aquanatal classes designed specifically for pregnant women.

WEIGHT TRAINING Use the weights sensibly and always under the guidance of a professional instructor. This is very important as your posture needs to be perfect to avoid injury.

WALKING Probably one of the best and most effective activities you can do. It is inexpensive and can be done anywhere and at any time. You can improve your fitness by walking at different speeds and up and down hills. Remember not to walk at such a pace that you become breathless.

DEEP BREATHING Deep abdominal breathing is the most efficient method of breathing for you and your baby. The best time to practise this exercise is when you are relaxed. This is usually in the morning or in the evening when other muscles are less likely to work

and proper isolation of the abdominal muscles can be achieved.

Another important factor to look at is good posture. The weight of the baby causes the lower back to curve as your centre of gravity moves forward. Your abdominal muscles become stretched as the baby grows so they are less able to contract and keep your lower back in proper alignment.

Try to maintain a pelvic tilt as much as possible, contract your abdominal and buttock muscles so that they act as a natural corset for your lower back. Keep your chin tucked in and your ears in a straight line with your shoulders.

Remember that your body is going through significant changes while pregnant, and there will be some forms of exercise that you are not able to do for the time being. Use common sense when choosing your fitness plan and you will be well on your way to being in great shape during pregnancy. ■