

MUMHOOD

Pregnancy Exercise Guidelines

Welcome to Mumhood!

As you embark on this exciting stage of your life, it can be really confusing as to what you can and can't do when it comes to exercise. We're here to help you understand the demands on your ever-changing body throughout each trimester and to help you make the right exercise choices.



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Gone are the days when we were told to 'sit on the sofa and eat cake' when pregnant. There is now plenty of research to prove that staying active during pregnancy has many benefits to both your mental and physical wellbeing.

HERE ARE JUST A COUPLE OF BENEFITS:

- ▶ Helps strengthen your body and overall endurance in preparation for labour.
- ▶ Helps you maintain a base level of fitness.
- ▶ Helps reduce backache, constipation, bloating and swelling.
- ▶ May help prevent, or treat gestational diabetes.
- ▶ Increases your energy levels.
- ▶ Improves circulation.
- ▶ Helps to relieve stress and muscle tension.
- ▶ Improves your mood.
- ▶ Improves your posture.
- ▶ Promotes better sleep.
- ▶ Aids your body's recovery after birth, including the strength and tone of your pelvic floor and core muscles.
- ▶ Can help prevent common 'mum aches' (shoulders, hips and back).
- ▶ Strengthening the back and postural muscles can go a long way to preparing your body for coping with the stresses of being a new mum.
- ▶ Helps you get back into training more easily after the birth.

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Is it safe to exercise when pregnant?

Yes! in most cases, exercise is perfectly safe and offers many health benefits.

You will inevitably gain weight, growing a baby will do that and it's a beautiful thing! Now is not the time to exercise for weight loss, and neither is it the time to start a new exercise regime. This doesn't mean don't exercise, but if your body hasn't been pre-conditioned to a particular form of exercise, it would be more beneficial to stick to pregnancy specific classes or work with a pre and postnatal trainer.

If you have been exercising regularly prior to pregnancy, you are totally fine to continue with the same types of exercise, so long as you bear in mind these exercise guidelines and understand the pregnancy modifications, if you are continuing with 'open' classes.

Exercise does not put you at risk of miscarriage in a normal pregnancy. You should always consult with your healthcare provider (GP / Midwife) before starting any exercise routine. However, please bear in mind that often these healthcare providers aren't always fully trained in prenatal exercise, so if you are categorized as a 'low risk' pregnancy, then these guidelines will likely give you more in-depth information than you will get from your healthcare provider. However, for anything other than a low risk pregnancy, you should always listen to your healthcare provider or seek more specific personal advice from a specialist.

A bit of science... Your baby is surrounded by fluid in the amniotic sac, which is nestled inside the uterus, which is surrounded by the organs, muscles and your physical body. This creates a rather safe environment for your developing baby.



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However even with this protection, it is recommended that you avoid high-impact exercise and take care not to over-push yourself, before you become bigger and you have your bump as a constant reminder!

TRAINING IN YOUR 1ST TRIMESTER

Many people are told to hold off exercise in the first trimester. This is your first stage of change and you and your body many feel extremely tired. You may not even feel like exercising, which is perfectly normal and ok. Listen to your body and how you feel. It is important to give yourself a break and rest when you feel you most need it.

For those who want to keep exercising; exercising in your 1st and 2nd trimester has been correlated with feeling better in the 3rd trimester; a decrease in perceived exertion during labour and is also associated with fewer symptoms and discomforts of pregnancy.

That said, it is advised to lower the intensity, the length of aerobic exercise during your first trimester, especially between 8-14 weeks, whilst your body gets to grips with the significant changes occurring. You should expect that you'll feel out of breathe easily during your first trimester as your heart has to work extra hard to pump the additional blood volume around your body.

Pregnancy guidelines

These guidelines are essential to keep in mind if you are going to keep exercising regularly.

- ▶ Always let your instructor know that you are pregnant at the start of a class so they can help you with modifications.



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- ▶ **Avoid contact sports, rapid changes in direction, and activities where falling is more likely** e.g. kickboxing, high impact dance classes, netball, horse riding, skiing, hockey... Exercises that involve jerking actions and sudden movement can place stress on joints, leading to postural misalignments or joint injuries. The risk of back injuries associated with weight training are also increased, so get some guidance on how best to support your body if you want to continue with weight training.
- ▶ **Avoid bouncing when stretching and overstretching.** It is good to stay mobile as possible, especially into the later stages of pregnancy when your body needs it most. Though be aware to limit the stretching of joints, especially if you are already hypermobile. Pregnancy increases the hormone Relaxin from the very early stages of pregnancy. This means that you will feel like you are more flexible when pregnant, but actually the Relaxin is softening your joints and ligaments in preparation for labour, however this increases your joint vulnerability during exercise, especially of the hips and lower back. You don't want to soften or the joints any further by over-stretching, as this will likely cause issues with recovery post-birth, when you're trying to knit your body back together. We would suggest you stretch to 80%v of your maximum, and think of 'strength' and alignment within your stretches rather than trying to get too deep.
- ▶ **Reduce the intensity of your exercise.** If you're doing a weights-based class or training, then reduce the weight you're lifting. If you are doing a cardio class, then reduce the intensity. So for example, in a Frame Cardio class, if you normally sprint on the treadmill at 15kph, then reduce this down to around 12 kph, or whatever feels right to you. If you usually use a 12kg kettlebell, think about switching to an 8kg. You never want to feel like you're working at maximum effort. A nice way to think about it, is to work to 70% of maximum effort at the most.

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- ▶ **Don't be afraid to take breaks** if you're feeling like your body temperature is getting too hot, or you're feeling out of breath.
- ▶ **Do not exercise in hot, humid weather or go to hot yoga classes.** It is really important that you regulate your body temperature during this time and don't get too hot.
- ▶ **Keep hydrated.** Always have water with you when exercising, and take regular sips.
- ▶ **Do not exercise to the point of exhaustion.**
- ▶ **Stay away from any exercise that puts direct pressure on the 'rectus abdominis' or your '6-pack muscles'.** For example ab crunches, sit ups, ab prep in Pilates, or 'knee to nose' in yoga or heavy weights over your head in a fitness class. Keep full body or loaded twists small or avoid if you are feeling a lot pressure through you mid trunk area. The long 6 pack muscle will start to stretch to create a parting (diastasis recti) of the abdominals walls for your baby to grow, leaving this area vulnerable to tearing, especially in the third trimester.
- ▶ **You are ok and in fact it's advised to work your transverse abdominals, and oblique muscles,** through controlled Pilates-based moves, modified planks, whole-body exercises and side bends.
- ▶ **Loaded twists should be kept light and to a small controlled range of movement,** so not to strain or potentially tear the mid abdominal line (diastasis recti). Remember to modify where necessary and to take the easier option when adaptations are given.
- ▶ **Avoid any 'closed twists'** where pressure is put on the abdominal cavity, should be avoided, for example 'revolved triangle' and 'revolved side angle' poses in yoga.



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- ▶ **Avoid any deep backbends and inversions in yoga classes.**
- ▶ **Squats are your friend during pregnancy.** This is the easiest way to automatically work your pelvic floor and to work on muscular endurance for your birth, where you are likely to spend a lot of time in the squat position!
- ▶ **Lying on your back is not a 'no go' but you must take care and listen to your body.** New research has shown that lying on your back (for exercises such as hip bridges, and footwork in Reformer Pilates) no longer needs to be completely avoided from the second trimester. However, lying on your back can start to feel uncomfortable as you move through your pregnancy and can start to limit blood flow due to the pressure that the weight of your baby is putting on your main artery, so if you start to feel dizzy or uncomfortable then simply roll to your left side and come out of the position.