

Mayo Clinic - Pregnancy and exercise

During pregnancy, exercise can help you stay in shape and prepare for labor and delivery. Here's the lowdown on pregnancy and exercise, from getting started to staying motivated.

Why exercise during pregnancy?

During pregnancy, exercise can:

- Ease or prevent back pain and other discomforts
- Boost your energy level
- Prevent excess weight gain
- Reduce the risk of gestational diabetes, pregnancy-related high blood pressure and postpartum depression
- Increase stamina and muscle strength, which helps you prepare for labor

Pregnancy and exercise: Getting the OK

Before you begin an exercise program, make sure you have your health care provider's OK. Although exercise during pregnancy is generally good for both mother and baby, you'll need to proceed with caution if you have a history of preterm labor or certain medical conditions, including:

- Poorly controlled diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Placenta previa, a problem with the placenta that can cause excessive bleeding before or during delivery

Pacing it for pregnancy

For most pregnant women, at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise is recommended on most, if not all, days of the week – but even shorter or less frequent workouts can help you stay in shape and prepare for labor.

Walking is a great exercise for beginners. It provides moderate aerobic conditioning with minimal stress on your joints. Other good choices include swimming, rowing and cycling on a stationary bike. Strength training is OK, too, as long as you avoid lifting heavy weights.

If you haven't exercised for a while, begin with as little as five minutes of physical activity a day. Build up to 10 minutes, 15 minutes, and so on, until you reach at least 30 minutes a day. If you exercised before pregnancy, you can probably continue to work out at the same level while you're pregnant – as long as you're feeling comfortable and your health care provider says it's OK. In general, you should be able to carry on a conversation while you're exercising. If you can't speak normally while you're working out, you're probably pushing yourself too hard.

Remember to stretch before and after each workout. Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated, and be careful to avoid overheating. No matter how dedicated you are to being in shape, don't exercise to the point of exhaustion.

Listen to your body

As important as it is to exercise, it's also important to watch for danger signs. Stop exercising if you notice:

- Dizziness
- Headache
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Abdominal pain
- Vaginal bleeding

If your signs and symptoms continue after you stop exercising, contact your health care provider.