

NHS - Exercise in pregnancy

The more active and fit you are during pregnancy, the easier it will be for you to adapt to your changing shape and weight gain. It will also help you to cope with labour and get back into shape after the birth. Keep up your normal daily physical activity or exercise (sport, dancing, or even walking to the shops and back) for as long as you feel comfortable.

Information includes:

- *Exercises to avoid*
- *Exercises for a fitter pregnancy*
- *Stomach strengthening exercises*
- *Pelvic tilt exercises*
- *Pelvic floor exercises*

Exercises to avoid

- don't lie flat on your back, particularly after 16 weeks, because your the weight of your bump presses on the big blood vessels and can make you feel faint
- don't take part in contact sports where there's a risk of being hit, such as kickboxing, judo or squash
- don't take part in horse riding, downhill skiing, ice hockey, gymnastics and cycling, because there is a risk of falling
- don't go scuba diving, because the baby has no protection against decompression sickness and gas embolism (gas bubbles in the bloodstream)
- don't exercise at heights over 2,500m above sea level until you have acclimatised: this is because you and your baby are at risk of altitude sickness (a decrease in oxygen)

Exercises for a fitter pregnancy

If you are pregnant you should try to fit these exercises into your daily routine. They will strengthen your muscles so that you can carry the extra weight of pregnancy. They'll also make joints stronger, improve circulation, ease backache and generally help you feel well.

Stomach strengthening exercises

As your baby gets bigger, you may find that the hollow in your lower back increases and this can give you backache. These strengthen stomach (abdominal) muscles and ease backache, which can be a problem in pregnancy:

- start in a box position (on all fours) with knees under hips, hands under shoulders, with fingers facing forward and abdominals lifted to keep your back straight
- pull in your stomach muscles and raise your back up towards the ceiling, curling the trunk and allowing your head to relax gently forward - don't let your elbows lock
- hold for a few seconds then slowly return to the box position
- take care not to hollow your back: it should always return to a straight/neutral position
- do this slowly and rhythmically 10 times, making your muscles work hard and moving your back carefully
- only move your back as far as you can comfortably

Pelvic tilt exercises

- stand with your shoulders and bottom against a wall
- keep your knees soft

- pull your tummy button towards your spine, so that your back flattens against the wall:
hold for four seconds and release
- repeat up to 10 times

Pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor exercises help to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor, which come under great strain in pregnancy and childbirth. The pelvic floor consists of layers of muscles that stretch like a supportive hammock from the pubic bone (in front) to the end of the backbone.

If your pelvic floor muscles are weak, you may find that you leak urine when you cough, sneeze or strain. This is quite common and you needn't feel embarrassed. It's known as stress incontinence and it can continue after pregnancy.

By performing pelvic floor exercises, you can strengthen the muscles. This helps to reduce or avoid stress incontinence after pregnancy. All pregnant women should do pelvic floor exercises, even if you're young and not suffering from stress incontinence now.

How to do pelvic floor exercises:

- close up your anus as if you're trying to prevent a bowel movement
- at the same time, draw in your vagina as if you're gripping a tampon, and your urethra as if to stop the flow of urine
- at first, do this exercise quickly, tightening and releasing the muscles immediately
- then do it slowly, holding the contractions for as long as you can before you relax: try to count to 10
- try to do three sets of eight squeezes every day: to help you remember, you could do them once at each meal

As well as these exercises, practise tightening up the pelvic floor muscles before and during coughing and sneezing.