

During your pregnancy, regular exercise is beneficial both physically and mentally. Each woman should find a form of exercise that is enjoyable, that does not cause stress or pain, and that fits within your lifestyle. This is a good opportunity to try new activities!

Find a form of exercise that:

- you like to do,
- increases your feelings of wellbeing,
- gently increases your heart rate, and
- can be sustained for at least 30 minutes 3-5x per week.

You can exercise naturally by integrating more movement into your daily life. Walk more frequently, do gentle stretching exercises or yoga while at home, bending, squatting exercises while doing housework or gardening. Some women enjoy joining prenatal fitness and prenatal yoga classes at their local community center. Many women enjoy prenatal yoga classes or DVDs as an addition to walking or swimming.

The basic rule of thumb is: Listen to your body to know how much is okay. A moderate amount of exercise such as walking or swimming three times a week for half an hour each time is beneficial, especially if you are not used to regular exercise. If you are used to a more active lifestyle and higher level of fitness, please continue with your exercise regimen. Very fit pregnant women have been known to complete half-marathons at six months! Be sure to drink water before, during and after every period of exercise.

When you become pregnant, your body goes through many hormonal changes that may affect the type of exercise you choose. One of the hormones that is released in your body is Relaxin. This hormone relaxes your ligaments, cartilage and muscles and enables them to stretch and move more easily. This facilitates movement of the pelvis allowing for the growth of your baby and to accommodate the baby through the pelvis during labour and birth. Because your joints are in a more relaxed state you may need to modify your exercise as your pregnancy advances as it can become much easier to strain or injure a joint under the influence of Relaxin. Some forms of exercise that may be enjoyable are: walking, swimming, water-aerobics, yoga, gentle stretching, tai chi, and dancing. Avoid high impact sports such as boxing, snowboarding, and river rafting!

Some excellent books on pregnancy fitness and exercise are:

- New Life - The Book of Exercises for Pregnancy and Childbirth by Janet and Arthur Balaskas.
- Guide to Moving through Pregnancy by Elisabeth Bing
- Essential Exercises for the Childbearing Years by Elizabeth Noble