

## Fact Sheet

# Exercise and Pregnancy

During pregnancy exercise is beneficial to both mother and baby. A safe exercise program will maintain general fitness, improve your mood, help manage the discomforts of pregnancy, prepare your body for childbirth and assist your body to return to normal after your baby is born.

## Benefits of Exercise

There are a number of benefits associated with exercise during pregnancy. Exercise helps to prepare you for the demands of childbirth and the increased physical demands of motherhood as well as providing you with the opportunity to meet other pregnant women. Other benefits include:

- Maintenance and improvement in general fitness level
- Providing a sense of well-being
- Improving muscle strength
- Improving sleep patterns
- Helping to control weight gain
- Reducing constipation

## What to look for in an exercise program

An exercise program should be enjoyable, achievable and flexible enough to allow you to modify the regime as needed.

If you are starting a new routine you should commence gently and progress slowly.

Some positions and movements will become more difficult and tiring as your pregnancy progresses and changes to the type, duration and intensity of exercise will be required.

Low impact exercises and activities that offer protection to your joints and ligaments are the most appropriate.

Targeting the pelvic floor and abdominal muscles is important as these muscles need to remain strong.

Awareness of posture and positioning for exercise is important. During the third trimester it is best to limit exercise when lying on your back and alternate positions are preferred.

## Body changes in pregnancy

### Increase in body weight

The average weight gain in pregnancy is 10-15kg. This weight gain and distribution of weight affects your balance and coordination. The body's centre of gravity is moved forward making it easier to lose your balance. Movements and exercises that consider balance and co-ordination are essential.

### Hormonal changes

Hormones such as relaxin affect the ligaments that support your joints and uterus making the ligaments lax. Exercise and activities that stress your ligaments, for example, running, fast change of direction, bouncy or jerky movements, need to be modified.

### Heart Rate

Your resting heart rate is increased during pregnancy. It is important to monitor how hard you feel you are exercising. The Borg's Rating of Perceived Exertion sets out these guidelines. You should feel no strain or shortness of breathe that prevents you talking when exercising.

### Blood Pressure

Your blood pressure drops in the second trimester and can make you feel faint if you change your position or move too quickly. During exercise it is important to move with caution, change position slowly and give your body time to adjust.

**Remember to keep in touch with your Obstetrician for ongoing guidance and advice.**

**Reference: The Wesley Hospital**

## Types of Exercise

### Exercises that are beneficial during pregnancy.

- Walking
- Swimming
- Exercise in water and
- Any exercise program specifically designed for pregnant women

### Exercises that should be limited or reduced as your pregnancy progresses.

- High impact activities like running, kick boxing or contact sport
- High intensity activities that include jerky, bouncy movements
- Lifting heavy weights or weights that make you feel stressed
- Long duration exercises that make you feel tired or breathless.

## When to stop exercising

If you notice any of the following you should stop your current exercise program.

- Any movement, exercise or movement that causes pain
- Chest pain, dizziness, feeling faint or heart palpitations during exercise
- Muscle weakness
- Any swelling or tingling anywhere
- Calf pain or swelling
- Vaginal bleeding or amniotic fluid leakage
- Abdominal contractions
- Any unusual change in your baby's movements

**If you have any concerns in relation to changes you experience during exercise you should not hesitate to contact a health practitioner or your Obstetrician.**

### References:

Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion

<http://sportsmedicine.about.com/cs/strengthening/a/030904.htm>

Victorian Government. [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

American Sites

[www.americanpregnancy.org/pregnancyhealth/exerciseguidelinehtml](http://www.americanpregnancy.org/pregnancyhealth/exerciseguidelinehtml)  
[www.acog.org/publications/patient\\_education/bp119.cfm](http://www.acog.org/publications/patient_education/bp119.cfm)

**Author:** D Eales, Physiotherapist, The Wesley Hospital  
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