

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## EXERCISE AND PREGNANCY

Before you get started on a pregnancy fitness program, talk to your doctor. Your physician will want to evaluate your fitness status in relation to your pregnancy, and your fitness instructor will most likely want your physician's approval or consent-to-exercise form before you begin an exercise program.

### **PLENTY OF BENEFITS**

Exercise during pregnancy offers many physical and emotional benefits. For example, a good exercise program may help relieve some of the common problems associated with pregnancy, such as excessive weight gain, swelling of your hands and feet, leg cramps, varicose veins, insomnia, fatigue and constipation.

You also can look forward to improved posture and circulation, reduced backaches, pelvic and rectal pressure and increased energy levels if you follow a well-designed exercise program while you're pregnant. And you'll feel better knowing you're doing something good for yourself, which is, of course, good for your baby.

### **KEEP MOVING EVERY OTHER DAY**

Pregnant women can participate in low-impact aerobic activity three times per week, or as often as every other day, if your physician agrees. But don't push it; if you're feeling exhausted, don't try to exercise. Walking is one of the best aerobic activities and, as long as your doctor says you can exercise and you're comfortable, do it. Just be sure to take the time to gradually warm up, and don't forget to stretch before and after your aerobic session.

### **WATER RELIEF**

The buoyancy effect of water may increase your comfort by supporting your weight and reducing any feelings of clumsiness or lack of balance. Swimming and other water exercises place muscles in a relaxed, non-weight-bearing position, providing relief to those who are carrying more pressure and stress as a result of pregnancy.



### **UNDERSTAND YOUR BODY**

Exercise during pregnancy should take into account the changes you're experiencing — new body alignment, different posture and reduced strength and endurance.

Your program should begin with a series of warm-up exercises and stretches that concentrate on hip, neck and shoulder movement and lower back flexibility. Any abdominal exercises should be modified to reduce strain. Because of the risks

associated with exercising on your back, your side is a good position for floor exercises.

### **LISTEN TO YOUR BODY**

If you experience any of the following symptoms, stop exercising and call your physician:

- ✎ increased uterine contractions
- ✎ vaginal bleeding
- ✎ amniotic fluid leakage
- ✎ dizziness or faintness
- ✎ shortness of breath
- ✎ palpitations
- ✎ persistent nausea or vomiting
- ✎ back or hip pain
- ✎ difficulty walking
- ✎ general swelling or edema
- ✎ numbness anywhere in your body

Check with the fitness centers in your area, the YMCA and community hospitals for exercise programs for pregnant women. One of the best ways to know if the instructor is knowledgeable in working with pregnant women is to be sure the instructor is ACE certified and has specialized training in pregnancy and exercise.

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