

The Right Amount of Exercise Before and During Pregnancy

Your Healthy News – Fertility Newsletter

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Exercise has many benefits which include building bone and muscle, keeping you healthy and happy, reducing stress, and giving you energy. Being overweight can be a factor for reduced fertility in women. Having excess estrogen, resulting from an increase in fat cells, may negatively affect your ability to conceive.

Benefits of Exercise

If you're stressed about your infertility, you might be gaining weight, suffering from mood swings or feeling overly tired. These are some of the same symptoms you'll experience during pregnancy. Stress can negatively affect your ability to get pregnant by increasing the production of stress hormones which have the potential to alter your ovulation cycle.

These stress symptoms can sometimes be helped by exercise as long as you do not have any serious complications or health conditions. Being active for 30 minutes most days, if not every day, of the week is beneficial to both you and your baby. Exercise can help prevent constipation, bloating, swelling, gestational diabetes, and improve posture and muscle tone. It will also help to improve energy, mood, and stamina which may be beneficial later during labor. Remember: before you begin any exercise program, it is important to talk with your physician.

Choosing the Right Exercise

Even with the potential for exercise to be beneficial before pregnancy, too much exercise can decrease necessary fat cells and negatively affect your ability to become pregnant. One way to make sure that you're not overdoing it is to monitor your breathing-- if you are able to talk normally while exercising your heart rate is at an acceptable level. If you have not exercised in a while, it is recommended to start slowly. Begin with as little as five minutes per day and increase by five minutes each week until you reach 30 minutes. After you exercise, it is beneficial to cool down for 5-10 minutes to help restore your body to a normal heart rate and to prevent muscle soreness.

If you're pregnant there are many changes happening in your body and some might affect your ability to exercise. Balance is something that is greatly affected during pregnancy. The extra weight that is carried in front of your body shifts your center of gravity, which can make you less stable and more likely to lose your balance. In addition, your body will have to work harder to circulate blood due to changes in weight. During pregnancy, hormone levels are changing all the time and can cause ligaments

that support joints to be more relaxed. The best way to prevent injury is by avoiding jerky and high-impact exercises such as plyometric training and basketball.

Walking, swimming, cycling on a stationary bicycle, and aerobics designed for pregnant women are all good options, even for beginners. Most give a total body workout, especially swimming. The water supports your weight which prevents joint and ligament injuries, and it helps to keep you from getting overheated. Exercises that need to be done in moderation include running and strength training. If you were a runner before you became pregnant, you may be able to continue to run. If you were not a runner, you should speak with your physician before starting a running routine. Exercises that should be avoided during pregnancy are contact sports, scuba diving, hiking, water skiing, and horseback riding; all have an increased risk of injury and fall and can cause harm to you and your baby.

General Guidelines

Beginning a new exercise regimen calls for more monitoring because of the changes that are happening within your body; whether you're beginning infertility treatment or have become pregnant. There is an increased chance that you may become overheated which can cause dehydration and other problems. Here are some guidelines to follow to help foster a healthy and beneficial exercise regimen.

- Avoid brisk or strenuous exercises in hot, humid weather.
- Drink plenty of water and make sure you consume extra daily calories you need during pregnancy.
- Wear a supportive bra that fits to protect your breasts.
- After the first trimester of pregnancy, avoid doing exercises on your back.
- Stop exercising and call your physician if you experience vaginal bleeding, increased shortness of breath, headache, calf pain, uterine contractions, decreased fetal movement, and fluid leaking from the vagina.

In general, it is best to pay attention to your body and how you are feeling. Don't exercise to the point where you are physically exhausted. A little exercise goes a long way.

Getting and Staying Motivated

Staying motivated about exercising can be hard when you aren't pregnant; continuing when you are pregnant might be even harder. Consider these simple ideas to help you maintain your exercise routine:

- 1) Start with something small such as walking around the neighborhood and vary your route every time to keep it interesting.
- 2) Ask a friend or your partner to partake in your routine. It can be a great way to involve future grandparents as well, keeping you both healthy and happy before the baby comes.

- 3) Listening to music or a book can help keep you energized and keep you from getting bored.
- 4) Trying different classes at hospitals or fitness centers for pregnant women offers variety to help you stay motivated.

Exercising before and continuing during pregnancy can give you and your baby better outcomes and help you build stamina for the challenges ahead. While it is recommended you be active for 30 minutes most days of the week, remember to pace yourself to build up stamina and if you feel too exhausted, it's okay to take a day off.

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