

Perinatal Exercise Program Guidelines

Permission:

Please mention this exercise class to your healthcare provider. Exercise is beneficial for most pregnant women. However, if any of the following conditions apply, you may be at higher risk while exercising.

- Heart disease
- Second or third trimester bleeding or history of bleeding
- Previous miscarriage or preterm labor
- Incompetent cervix/cerclage
- High blood pressure before or during pregnancy
- Anemia
- Multiple gestation
- Baby not growing appropriately
- Pulmonary, vascular, thyroid, or other medical conditions your healthcare provider feels will restrict your activity

Clothing and Nutrition:

It is helpful to wear clothing that keeps you cool, such as light clothing in layers that you can shed while exercising. Wear supportive clothing such as support hose/stockings if needed for varicose veins, a good sports bra, and good supportive tennis shoes.

Eat a light, high carbohydrate snack one to two hours prior to exercising to prevent low blood sugar. Eat a banana or drink orange juice after exercising to replace potassium. Drink lots of fluids; preferably water before, during, and after exercising.

Discontinue exercising if you experience any of the following warning signs, and contact your healthcare provider:

- Severe abdominal pain, cramps, or backache
- Any vaginal bleeding
- Gush or flow of watery fluid from your vagina
- Regular low cramping sensations, with or without intermittent tightening of your abdomen
- A headache that does not go away with medication and rest
- Marked increase of swelling in your face, feet, or hands
- Sudden weight gain within a few days
- Blurred, spotty, or other visual changes
- Fever over 100° F
- Severe nausea/vomiting or diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours
- Pain or burning during urination
- Any decrease or cessation of baby's movements

Precautions during Exercise:

Avoid overheating. During pregnancy, your body temperature is already one to two degrees above normal due to your hormonal changes and your baby's metabolism.

Limit exercising on your back after 20 weeks of pregnancy due to the compression on your greater blood vessels, causing a reduction of blood flow to the placenta and baby. This may also cause some light-headedness or dizziness.

Exercise only to the intensity that feels slightly hard but allows you to carry on a conversation without feeling winded.

Stretch slow and steady to decrease muscle soreness. Avoid stretching to the full limit to avoid injury to the joint. During pregnancy, your joints and ligaments are more lax due to the increase in the hormone relaxin.

Watch your balance. Avoid quick twists and turns, and jerky movements.

Eliminate cross-body movements and forward-bending movements.

Emphasize exhaling on exertion to avoid a valsalva response (holding your breath). This will improve your oxygen intake, and help to keep them at steady levels.

Use correct posture with engaged abdominal muscles while exercising to avoid back strain.

Contract pelvic floor muscles (Kegals) to increase circulation and elasticity.

Discontinue exercising at anytime if you feel pain or discomfort!

BENEFITS OF PERINATAL EXERCISE

Exercise:

Because of its numerous emotional and physical benefits, exercise has long been considered an extremely effective stress management tool. Stress is considered to be anything that upsets our equilibrium. There can be positive stress like getting married and negative stress like going through a divorce. Needless to say, the profound event of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum can be considered a positive stress. Coping positively with the stress of pregnancy through exercise can offer the expectant mother the following potential benefits:

Emotional:

- ♥ Enhances well-being and self esteem
- ♥ Increases confidence and feeling of control
- ♥ Decreases tension and anxiety
- ♥ Group support and empowerment
- ♥ Increases sense of pride about the pregnancy

Physical:

- ♥ Increases body awareness - feeling more connected and accepting a changing body
- ♥ Increases energy, endurance, strength, and flexibility
- ♥ Improves circulation, posture, balance, and body mechanics
- ♥ Prevention or reduction in common complaints of pregnancy
 - Decreases risk of clot formation, varicosities, peripheral edema, and hot flashes
 - Significant decrease in backaches, headaches, and fatigue
 - Decrease in shortness of breath
 - Improves digestion and elimination
- ♥ Maintains and/or improves cardiovascular endurance
- ♥ Maintains and/or improves muscular strength and endurance
- ♥ Maintains cardiovascular fitness for women already fit prior to pregnancy
- ♥ Increases pelvic floor strength
- ♥ Improvement for elimination of stress urinary incontinence
 - Increased nerve-muscle connection after over-stretching
 - Enhanced sexual response
 - Faster healing from episiotomies and tears
 - Increased elasticity of the pelvic floor musculature
- ♥ Reduction in weight gain and fat accumulation
- ♥ More rapid postpartum recovery

Spiritual:

- ♥ Increases bonding between mother and baby as well as other pregnant women
- ♥ Opportunity to provide greater meaning to the pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum experience

BENEFITS TO AN “EXERCISING” BABY

According to James F. Clapp, MD, in his book “Exercising Through Your Pregnancy”, babies born to fit women in his study experienced the following:

- The baby is considered “more resilient” in fit women during the stresses of labor
- The placenta is healthier
- The baby tolerates contractions better
- The caregiver’s concern regarding baby’s condition was less than half compared to the control group
- A decrease in incidence of cord entanglement
- A lower incidence of meconium at birth
- Leaner, lower birth weight infants due to less fat and not due to growth retardation
- Mothers report their babies are easier to care for. Preliminary findings show babies who have “exercised” during pregnancy respond well to their environment. They are more able to sooth themselves and need less consoling
- The stimulation of sound and vibrations occurring during exercise may increase the fetal brain development
- At 1 year of age, the babies’ mental and physical performance was better as compared to “non-exercising” babies
- At 5 years of age, they scored much higher on test of general intelligence and oral language skills
- They were less fat and weighed less than babies of non-exercising moms