

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & EXERCISE

This handout covers some recommendations for **physical activity and exercising** while you are pregnant. Read it to find out what sorts of activities you can do and how you can safely engage in exercise.

**Note: Recommendations in this handout apply to people who have been cleared to exercise by their physician.**



## WHO CAN SAFELY EXERCISE WHILE PREGNANT?

Generally, pregnant people with uncomplicated, low-risk pregnancies can exercise safely, as long as they follow some **safety precautions**. Previously inactive pregnant people can safely start exercising with the goal of achieving the recommended minimum activity. Exercise can be initiated **at any point** during pregnancy. However, there are **some medical conditions** that **prevent people from exercising while pregnant**. You should **speak to your doctor before exercising** to determine if and how you can exercise safely.

## WHO SHOULD AVOID EXERCISING WHILE PREGNANT?

You should avoid exercising while pregnant if you have any of the following (this is **not an exhaustive list**):

- certain **heart** and **lung** diseases
- a cerclage in place (stitch in the cervix)
- your waters are broken
- short cervix
- severe anemia (low blood levels)
- uncontrolled pre-eclampsia or high blood pressure
- premature labour
- multiple pregnancy (e.g., twins, triplets, etc.) **and** at risk for pre-term labour
- unexplained, persistent vaginal bleeding
- placenta previa (after 20 weeks or sooner, if advised)
- uncontrolled type 1 diabetes
- uncontrolled thyroid disease

## BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY

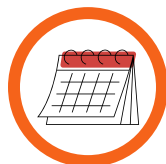
Not only has physical activity during pregnancy not been shown to increase your risk of developing pregnancy complications, **exercise actually reduces the risk of certain complications during pregnancy** including **gestational diabetes and high blood pressure**.

It is important that you follow **safety precautions** and the advice of your physician.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



aim for a total of  
150 minutes of  
moderate exercise  
every week



spread your  
exercise out  
over at least 3  
days every week



ideally no exercise flat  
on back beyond 20  
weeks gestation due to  
risk of reduced blood  
flow to your brain/heart



do both aerobic  
exercise and  
resistance training  
**\* examples  
on next page**



doing Kegel exercises  
everyday may reduce  
your risk of urinary  
incontinence (involuntary  
leaking of pee!)

## ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO

**1) Aerobic exercise** is any activity that makes your heart pump faster and your body use more oxygen.

Examples of aerobic exercise that you can do **while pregnant** are:

- fast-paced walking
- swimming
- stationary biking
- aquafit

**2) Resistance exercise** is any activity that makes your muscles work against some kind of force, in order to make them stronger.

You can do any kind of resistance training while pregnant as long as you follow **safety precautions**, and **don't over-exert yourself**. Examples include: squats, lunges, bicep curls, tricep curls, planks, pushups, and more.

## ACTIVITIES TO AVOID

- any **vigorous** physical activity/exercise that increases your heart rate **above 140 beats per minute**
- activities involving **physical contact** or that have a **risk of falling** (e.g., horseback riding, downhill skiing, ice hockey, biking outside, hiking on uneven ground, etc.)
- scuba diving
- activities in **excessive heat**, especially with **high humidity** (e.g., hot yoga)
- activity at high altitude (>2500m)



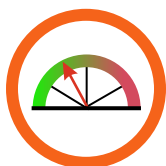
### Helpful tips:

- **Start slow & easy.** Increase the duration/intensity of your exercise gradually.
- **Do what you can.** Doing a little bit of exercise, even if it's below the recommended amount, can still have benefits for your health.
- Adding **yoga & gentle stretches** to your routine may help prevent complications.

## SAFETY PRECAUTIONS



**Stay hydrated.** Drink water before, during, and after exercise.



Only do low and moderate intensity exercise. High intensity/vigorous exercise may not be safe for you or your baby.



Always warm-up and cool-down to reduce your risk of injury, since your range of motion is different during pregnancy.



Make sure you are eating enough before and after you exercise.

## SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IMMEDIATELY IF YOU DEVELOP ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS:

- shortness of breath that doesn't get better when you stop exercising
- consistent and/or painful contractions
- severe chest pain
- dizziness or faintness that doesn't get better when you stop exercising
- bleeding from your vagina
- fluid coming out of your vagina

### References

Mottola MF, Davenport MH, Ruchat SM, et al. No. 367-2019 Canadian Guideline for Physical Activity throughout Pregnancy. J Obstet Gynaecol Can. 2018;40(11):1528-1537. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Exercise During Pregnancy [Internet]. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. 2022. Available from: <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/exercise-during-pregnancy>

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