



## Exercise During Pregnancy

Exercise is good for everyone, but it provides some special benefits during pregnancy. Exercise helps relieve some of the most common complaints of pregnant women:

- **Constipation.** The digestive tract benefits from exercise. Those who exercise often are less likely to have constipation.
- **Fatigue.** Exercise helps reduce fatigue and creates more energy.
- **Stress.** Exercise promotes relaxation and works off tension.
- **Anxiety.** Depression and anxiety are less likely with regular exercise. Exercise releases endorphins, the body's natural "feel good" chemicals.
- **Backache.** Muscle strength increases with exercise.

If you were exercising before pregnancy, it may be fine for you to continue. Check with your doctor to be sure. Studies show that in low-risk pregnancies exercise is not harmful to a developing baby. Exercise may not be advisable in high-risk pregnancies, however. If you have an incompetent cervix or vaginal bleeding, or if your baby is not growing well, your doctor may not want you to exercise. Similarly, if you have health issues such as high blood pressure or diabetes, exercise may not be advisable. If your pregnancy is high-risk or if you have other health problems, don't exercise without your doctor's approval.

Exercising at least three times a week for about 30 minutes is enough activity to provide health benefits. However, intermittent activity several times a day is also beneficial. That means that even things like housework, gardening, and brief walks "count" as exercise for those who can't participate in an exercise program.

For most pregnant women, exercises like swimming, stationary cycling, and walking pose no risks and are safe throughout pregnancy. Exercises that risk falls--horseback riding, skiing, skating--should be avoided, especially in the third trimester when balance may be "off." After the first trimester women should not exercise while lying on their backs. This can reduce the flow of blood to the uterus. Pregnant women should always stop exercising at the first sign of fatigue. Other "stop signs" are dizziness, nausea, chest pain, contractions, vaginal bleeding, or headache.

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