

What is pregnancy?

Pregnancy is an incredible time for a woman marked by an amazing, and at times challenging, transformation. Pregnancy might leave you feeling delighted, anxious, exhilarated and exhausted — sometimes all at once. Common physical changes during pregnancy include bouts of nausea from rapidly rising levels of estrogen and progesterone, tender, swollen breasts, increased urination, fatigue and dizziness, and increasing laxity in joints due to hormones, all of which must be managed appropriately to avoid injury.

For those going through pregnancy without any complications, there is no reason they cannot exercise whilst pregnant. Staying active and incorporating regular exercise into a pregnancy routine offers a host of benefits for the mum-to-be. Regular exercise will help keep pregnant women healthy and help avoid pregnancy complications like preeclampsia and diabetes.

How does exercise help during pregnancy?

Exercise is important for everyone and regular physical exercise can provide many social, mental, health and fitness benefits during pregnancy.

Exercise during pregnancy is particularly recommended to reduce pregnancy related hypertension and gestational diabetes. Not all exercises are suitable for pregnant women however – so seek professional advice early.

Things to remember

- Exercise should be terminated should any of the following occur: vaginal bleeding, dyspnea before exertion, dizziness, headache, chest pain or muscle pain.
- Pregnant women should avoid exercising in the supine position (lying on your back) after the first trimester to ensure that venous obstruction does not occur.
- Deconditioning typically occurs during the initial postpartum period, so women should gradually increase physical activity levels until pre-pregnancy physical fitness levels are achieved.
- Increased laxity in joints due to hormonal changes can cause injury if not managed appropriately.

What type of exercise is best for pregnant women?

Exercise Right recommends the following simple exercises which are appropriate for women who are pregnant:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Specialised pilates/yoga
- Stretching
- General strength training exercises
- Hydrotherapy (only in early months of pregnancy)
- Pelvic floor exercise (this is especially crucial post-pregnancy)

What exercises should be avoided during pregnancy?

- Contact sports or high impact activities that may cause loss of balance or trauma
- Competition sports or activities
- Lying on your back after the 4th month of pregnancy
- Examples of sports to avoid include: soccer, basketball, hockey, horseback riding, and vigorous intensity racquet sports
- Exercising in an overheated pool

Always seek professional advice from an Accredited Exercise Physiologist. Find one here: www.essa.org.au/find-aep