

The Do's and Don'ts of Exercise During Pregnancy

Even safe sports and exercise programs need to be closely monitored during pregnancy. This list of do's and don'ts will help you make informed decisions about your workout regimen:

Don'ts:

- Don't begin a new exercise program without explicit permission from your doctor if you ...
 - Have toxemia.
 - Have high blood pressure.
 - Have kidney or heart disease.
 - Have a history of miscarriage or premature birth.
 - Are excessively overweight.
 - Have placenta previa or bleeding during pregnancy.
 - Have asthma.
 - Are carrying multiples.
- Don't overdo it. If an exercise hurts, skip it. If you feel fatigued, stop. Don't push through to exhaustion. If you can't speak comfortably, you've passed the safe point. Listen to your body, and exercise only as long as it feels good.
- After the first trimester, don't do exercises (sit-ups, for example) while lying flat on your back. This position causes the weight of the baby to press on a vein leading to the heart. This can decrease the blood flow to the fetus.
- Don't do exercises that involve excessive stretching. Your joints and ligaments are lax and prone to injury.

Do's:

When you begin a prenatal physical fitness program, there are a few things to keep in mind so that you and your baby get the most benefit from your efforts:

- Talk to your health-care provider before you begin any exercise regimen. Explain what you've done pre-pregnancy, what you want to do now, and how much and how often you want to exercise. Together you'll come up with a program that gives you all the benefits of exercise without any of the risks.
- Warm up your muscles before you exercise. Walk slowly or ride a stationary bike for at least five minutes before your exercise session.

- Cool down after your exercise period. Walk around slowly until your breathing and heart rate have returned to normal. Stopping exercise suddenly can cause dizziness.
- Rise slowly. When you get up from the floor too quickly, you can get dizzy or even faint because your heart is working so hard to pump blood to all your exercised muscles that it might not get a full supply to the brain. Always rise slowly.
- Drink lots of water before, during, and after exercising.
- Keep cool. It's important that you don't overheat, especially in the first trimester. Be sure to wear loose clothing and drink plenty of fluids, before, during, and after your workout. Avoid strenuous workouts outdoors on hot, humid days.
- Keep up your calorie intake. Even if the only exercise you get is lifting the TV remote, you need 300 additional calories to feed your baby each day. When you exercise you'll need more to replace the lost calories. Do not exercise to lose weight during pregnancy.
- Schedule a definite exercise time each day. Life is hectic and things that aren't scheduled don't get done. Set aside about 20 to 30 minutes at least three days a week for exercising.