

Developing an Exercise Routine During Pregnancy
 Compiled with information from Exercising Through Your Pregnancy by
 James Clapp, MD

Most women can continue an exercise program during pregnancy with few restrictions. Please refer to “Exercise Guidelines During Pregnancy” for a list of contraindications to exercise during pregnancy. For women who did not exercise prior to their pregnancies, it is considered safe to begin an exercise routine during pregnancy. Of course, it is always a good idea to check with your doctor before starting any exercise program. The following guidelines should prove helpful in designing a program for safe and effective exercise during pregnancy.

□ **Intensity**

The intensity of exercise should be at a level that is moderate to somewhat hard during pregnancy. Heart rate is not an accurate measure of exertion during pregnancy because of all the vascular changes occurring in the body. The most accurate and safe way to gauge exercise intensity is to use the Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE). The moderate to somewhat hard level translates to a 12-14 on the 20-point scale or 3-4 on the newer 10- point scale.

Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion Scale			
6-20 Scale		0-10 Scale	
6		0	Nothing at all
7	Very, Very Light	1	Very Weak
8		2	Weak
9	Very Light	3	Moderate
10		4	Somewhat Strong
11	Fairly Light	5	Strong
12		6	
13	Somewhat Hard	7	Very Strong
14		8	
15	Hard	9	
16		10	Very, Very Strong
17	Very Hard		
18			
19	Very, Very Hard		

□ **Duration**

The duration of exercise should be modified to enable the participant to achieve a moderate to somewhat hard level of intensity without discomfort or undue fatigue. Some types of exercise, such as non-weight bearing activities like swimming, may require a longer duration in order to achieve a training effect. Thirty minutes or more of exercise is recommended for optimal benefits.

Some women find they are able to tolerate a longer duration, lower intensity exercise bout (12 versus 14 on the 20-point RPE scale) better than a higher intensity shorter bout as their pregnancy progresses.

□ **Frequency**

The number of days each week that a pregnant woman can safely exercise depends on the following;

1. Her level of fitness
2. How her pregnancy is progressing
3. The intensity and type of activity

Three days a week is the minimum needed to achieve benefits and gain improvements in fitness. Consistent exercise is healthier than spontaneous bursts. Reduce exercise frequency if signs of over training or undue fatigue occur and allow for more rest days between exercise sessions.

□ **Type**

The best type of exercise for a pregnant woman depends on the following:

1. The activities enjoyed by the mother
2. Whether the activity poses any risk to the mother or fetus
3. Whether she is able to perform the activity without being compromised by balance and center of gravity changes
4. Whether the activity can be easily modified as her pregnancy progresses
5. Whether common sense says the activity is safe to continue during pregnancy

Some researchers have found that including sustained, weight bearing exercise such as walking or jogging attains greater benefits. However, non-weight bearing activities may be more comfortable for the mother and also offer many benefits. Water aerobics or swimming can help alleviate some of the swelling that plagues many pregnant women.

The following is a list of activities that are not recommended during pregnancy:

1. Downhill skiing
2. High-altitude sports
3. Hockey
4. Gymnastics
5. Horseback riding
6. Surfing
7. Scuba Diving
8. Water-skiing

The first six activities are relative risks; some women may be able to safely perform them depending on her skill and health and fitness level. Scuba diving and water skiing should be avoided by all pregnant women.