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Is it safe to exercise during pregnancy?

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) 2002 Guidelines for Exercise and Activity in pregnancy states that “despite profound anatomical and physiological changes in pregnancy, there are few instances that should prevent otherwise healthy women from following the same recommendations for physical activity as for healthy non-pregnant women. Pregnancy is no longer considered a “condition for confinement”

Exercise is actually a big plus for both you and your baby. Strong muscles and a fit heart can greatly ease labor and delivery. The benefits of exercise (whether or not pregnant) are positive self-image, improved posture, increased cardiovascular capacity, and sense of “well being” In general, exercise programs should include: warm up, an aerobic component (which can include light weights), cool down, and a relaxation period.

The Centers for Disease Control/American College of Sports Medicine recommendations for exercise include 30 min or more of moderate intensity physical activity most or (preferably) every day, including aerobic and cardiorespiratory. Overheating is a concern for pregnant women exercising longer than 35 minutes and you should avoid exercising outdoors on hot days.

Before starting an exercise program talk with your obstetrical health care provider to make sure there are no medical risks before starting an exercise program and if there are no indications to the contrary, woman are encouraged to engage in regular, moderate intensity physical activity.

Deciding on what type of exercise depends on what interests you and what your doctor advises. Many women enjoy dancing, swimming, water aerobics, yoga, pilates, biking, or walking. Try for a combination of cardio (aerobic), strength, and flexibility exercises.

Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, it's also a good idea to avoid any activities that include:

- bouncing
- jarring (anything that would cause a lot of up and down movement)
- leaping
- a sudden change of direction
- a risk of abdominal injury or strain

Whatever type of exercise you and your doctor decide on, the key is to listen to your body's warnings. Many women, for example, become dizzy early in their pregnancy, and as the baby grows, their center of gravity changes. So it may be easy for you to lose your balance, especially in the last trimester.

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