

Exercise in Pregnancy

Take Home Points

- Exercise is strongly recommended in pregnancy
- Regular physical activity benefits both moms and babies without harming the fetus
- Target 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity split over a minimum of 3 days per week

There are many benefits to exercise in pregnancy for both mothers and their babies. Exercise decreases the risks of gestational diabetes, gestational hypertension, pre-eclampsia, depression, and excessive weight gain. Exercise does not harm the baby. It DOES NOT raise the risk of miscarriage, premature birth, or low birth weight.

There are both relative and absolute contraindications that apply to a narrow fraction of women, which can be found at the following link: <http://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2018-100056>

Pregnant women should be encouraged to participate in a mix of moderate-level aerobic exercise, resistance training, and stretching or yoga. Clarification should be provided that during moderate physical activity, women should be able to speak comfortably. If they cannot, they should decrease the intensity of the exercise.

Activities that cause women to feel unwell should be avoided. These are commonly activities involving supine position or Valsalva maneuver. Activities in dangerous environments or those that can result in falling or a trauma to the abdomen should also be avoided. These activities include hot yoga, outdoor cycling, and most team sports.

What about exercise for the competitive athlete?

There is insufficient evidence to provide clear guidelines on exercising above a moderate intensity. Women who are interested in continuing high-level physical activity should be referred to a physician familiar with caring for athletes in pregnancy.

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References

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2. Mottola, M. F., Davenport, M. H., Ruchat, S. M., Davies, G. A., Poitras, V. J., Gray, C. E., et al. (2018). 2019 Canadian guideline for physical activity throughout pregnancy. *Br J Sports Med*, 52(21), 1339-1346.