

## Can I exercise during pregnancy?

- Yes – all women are encouraged to exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy.
- For most pregnancies, regular mild or moderate physical activity is not only safe, but offers countless health benefits.
- If you have a medical condition or are concerned about safely exercising, your physiotherapist, midwife or doctor can guide you.

## What are the benefits of exercising during pregnancy?

- Promotes optimal weight gain,
- Improves aerobic fitness,
- Increases muscle tone, stamina and strength,
- Improves likelihood of going into labour naturally, rather than being induced,
- Reduces leg and back pain, constipation, ankle swelling, bloating, and varicose veins,
- Improves mood and general energy levels,
- Promotes restful sleep,
- May help prevent gestational diabetes,
- Helps to get your body back in shape after delivery.

## What type of exercise is best for me during pregnancy?

- Aerobic and strength training exercise is particularly beneficial for pregnant women,
- Aerobic (cardiovascular) training includes brisk walking, running or jogging, swimming, aerobics or aqua aerobics and dancing,
- Strength training involves resistance exercises, weight lifting, Pilates and yoga,
- Pelvic floor muscle exercises will help prevent urinary and faecal incontinence (ask your physiotherapist for guidance on this),
- Aim to do about 30 minutes every day,
- This can be split into three 10 minute sessions over the day,
- Women who are very active prior to pregnancy can continue to exercise safely at the same intensity, provided their condition stays the same and they talk to their health care provider about their activity level throughout their pregnancy,
- Make sure to stay well hydrated while exercising.

## Are there exercises I should avoid when pregnant?

- This may depend on your specific exercise routine – you can discuss doctor or physiotherapist if you are unsure of the risk or
- Avoid exercising while lying flat on your back after week 16 of pregnancy.
- Some sports carry a risk of abdominal injury, e.g. tennis or squash, soccer, hurling, Gaelic football, martial arts and basketball.
- You should also avoid exercises where there is a high risk of falling, e.g. gymnastics, horse riding, skiing and cycling.
- Avoid Scuba diving during pregnancy.

## What intensity level should I exercise at?

- Make sure you do a warm-up and cool-down.
- Aim to exercise at moderate levels, this means sweating, keeping the heart rate up, but being able to carry out a conversation.

If you have any questions or concerns about exercising during pregnancy, ask your doctor, midwife or physiotherapist.

*Updated by Fiona Dunlevy MINDI and Orna O'Brien, MINDI January 2016.*

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