



Staying active during pregnancy



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

Activity plays an important role through the different stages of pregnancy. This booklet is part of a series to provide support at each stage of the journey.

Please be aware these booklets are given as guidance. Advice about nutrition and activity can be subject to change and any advice given by your midwife or a medical health professional should always be followed.

Contents

Introduction.....	2
The importance of being active	3
Breathlessness.....	3
Relaxin	4
Exercise and activities to avoid	5
Exercise and activities to include	5
Exercise and activity after giving birth	5
The Foodwise in Pregnancy app	5
Find out more	6



The importance of being active

The topic of physical activity during pregnancy can be confusing. When you read advice and all the countless 'dos and don'ts', it can often seem like pregnant women aren't allowed to do much at all.

However, staying active is important to keep a good level of overall health throughout pregnancy. Remaining active can help to support a pregnancy that is free from complications all the way through, including labour and birth, as well as helping your recovery after birthing.

Every woman reacts to the changes, demands and stresses of pregnancy differently, so it's important to safely maintain your normal daily levels of physical activity for as long as you feel comfortable.

Pregnancy is not the time to be start thinking about intense fitness training, starting a new sport, gym routine or exercise class. However, that doesn't mean you can't try something new.

The focus should be on maintaining basic levels of health and fitness, ensuring that you are staying clear of any exercise or physical activity which may be harmful to you or your baby.

You should always seek professional advice before starting an activity, or work with an instructor who is ante and post-natal qualified. They will help ensure you exercise safely as you progress through your pregnancy.

If you weren't exercising regularly for at least six months before you became pregnant, then pregnancy is **not** the time to start. There are benefits to being more active, but you should start with something gentle. Exercise and physical activity doesn't have to be strenuous to be beneficial.

If the exercise you are performing is safe to continue throughout your pregnancy, you should decrease its intensity and duration with each trimester (first trimester = 0-14 weeks, second trimester = 14-28 weeks, third trimester = 28-40/42 weeks).

If you take part in exercise classes or sports, you should inform the instructor or coach that you are pregnant and by how many weeks.

Breathlessness

When being active during pregnancy, you should always still be able to hold a conversation. If you become breathless as you talk and exercise at the same time, you're probably exercising too strenuously.

It's important to ensure your body receives oxygen and becoming breathless places excess strain on our bodies. When performing exercise or physical activity, you should feel like you are breathing deeper and a little faster, but still feel comfortable enough to continue.

Relaxin

Relaxin is produced by the ovaries and placenta and is present throughout pregnancy, but at its highest levels during the first trimester. Relaxin helps women to prepare for pregnancy by loosening the muscles and ligaments around the pelvis and hips in preparation for childbirth. This means the body becomes more flexible and joints have a greater range of movement.

Relaxin aims to prepare the body for childbirth, but it affects all the joints of the body. Because of this, all joints are more susceptible to injury. Changes and adaptations to activity routines are therefore key to reducing injury risks and maintaining the health, strength and fitness of our bones, joints and muscles.

Careful consideration about movement patterns, body positioning, weight, or type of activity is needed. After giving birth, relaxin levels begin to drop but can remain for up to six months and longer if breastfeeding.

Exercise and activities to avoid

If you did regularly exercise before you became pregnant then certain exercises or forms of exercise may not be appropriate during your pregnancy due to the increased risk of causing you or your baby harm.

Regardless of your activity levels pre-pregnancy, from the moment you find out you are pregnant **you must stop** doing any of the following activities:

- High impact exercises (including bounding, jumping, hopping or skipping)
- Forward or backward bending exercises (e.g. sit-ups, crunches, side bends or back hyper extensions)
- Sports with a high risk of falling or contact (e.g. netball, horse riding, skiing, snowboarding, water skiing, bike riding, football and rugby)
- Scuba diving, as the baby has no protection against decompression sickness or gas embolism
- Isometric exercises in which you hold your body still in one position with muscles tense (e.g. a plank)
- Exercises which require you to hold your breath for any length of time
- Lying on your back for long periods of time (second trimester onwards)
- Sports that require sprinting, sudden changes of direction, or long periods of running
- Altitude exercise at heights above 2,000m above sea level, as altitude sickness can harm mother and baby
- Exercise which involves heavy lifting
- Exercise in weather that is unusually hot, humid or cold, thereby causing body temperature fluctuations and changes in the regulation of body temperature

As with all stages of pregnancy, if you are unsure about any physical activity then please speak to your midwife team, your GP, or an ante and post-natal qualified Be Well coach.

Exercise and activities to include

It's important to maintain general health and fitness during pregnancy, but it's especially important to focus on our bones, muscles and joints of the hip and pelvis area.

With this in mind, here are some recommendations and pieces of advice you should follow during your activities, along with some suggested types of exercise to take part in:

- keep your feet no wider than shoulder-width apart during exercise
- spend more time warming up and cooling down before and after exercise
- swimming or aqua natal are good types of exercise due to the reduced pressure on joints
- perform some form of physical activity every day (even just walking for 30 minutes per day can be enough)
- Pilates and yoga are great forms of exercise to support joints and muscle strength during pregnancy
- perform pelvic floor and pelvic tilt exercises daily

Kegal exercises

Kegal exercises (also known as pelvic floor exercises) are important to help strengthen the muscles around the pelvis, helping to support labour and childbirth and prevent stress incontinence. You can find out more about these exercises and how to perform them on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/womens-health/what-are-pelvic-floor-exercises

Exercise and activity after giving birth

After giving birth, you are able to start gentle exercise as soon as you feel ready, although it's recommended you wait until you've had your six-week check before starting a more formal exercise routine again or returning to more intense sports.

You will receive individual advice based on the type of birth, but whatever your circumstances you should always start again slowly and rebuild your fitness gradually.

With an extra person around to take care of, finding the time can be hard - so don't put too much pressure on yourself and find something you enjoy that fits in with your new routine.

The Foodwise in Pregnancy app

The Foodwise in Pregnancy app has useful information on eating well, keeping active and achieving health weight gain in pregnancy. There are six sections to work through at your own pace, including interactive games, quizzes and tools. It also features:

- Tips and advice for achieving a healthy diet
- Practical ideas for keeping active
- Recipes, shopping tips and a meal planner
- Step-by-step exercises ideal for pregnancy

The app is free to download for iPhone and Android. Just search 'Foodwise in Pregnancy' in your usual app store.

Find out more

For all other information on healthy eating during pregnancy, speak to your midwife who will be able to advise you further, or visit the links below:

First Steps Nutrition Trust

www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-early-years

Wigan Council Ante Natal Support

www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Health-Social-Care/Children-and-young-people/Health-and-wellbeing/Early-Years.aspx

NHS Ante Natal Support

www.wvl.nhs.uk/antenatal-information

Family Hubs

www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Education/Family-Hubs/index.aspx

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

Telephone: 01942 496496

Email: wellbeing@bewellwigan.org

Website: bewellwigan.org

