

### Staying safe

- Physical activity is safe if you start slowly and build up gradually to the recommended levels
  - Exercise at a comfortable level
  - Warm up and cool down gradually
  - Take care when stretching - don't overstretch your softened ligaments
  - Wear cool, comfortable clothing, a supportive sports bra and footwear
  - Drink plenty of fluids
  - Ensure you are getting adequate rest.
- Avoid**
- Exercising in hot, humid environments
  - Exhaustive exercise
  - Activities with a risk of abdominal injury (eg. horse riding, skiing, road cycling)
  - High impact activities (eg. running, jumping)
  - Rapid changes in direction or position
  - Supine (lying on the back) exercise after the first trimester.
- If you get any of the following problems, ask for medical advice from your GP or by contacting NHS Direct (see below)
- Pain in the back, pelvis or abdomen
  - Excessive shortness of breath
  - Vaginal bleeding or fluid loss
  - Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.
  - Vaginal bleeding or fluid loss
  - Uterine contractions
  - Absence of foetal movement

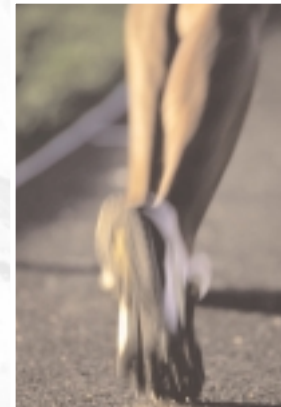
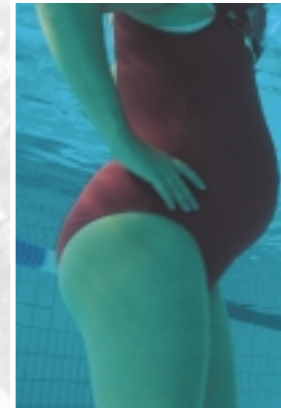
Remember: The more active you are, the more benefits you will get.

## Be active - be safe - have fun!

### For more information

- BBC Online Health [www.bbc.co.uk/health/fitness/life\\_pregnancy.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/fitness/life_pregnancy.shtml)
- The National Childbirth Trust 0870 4448707 or [www.nctpregnancyandbaby.com](http://www.nctpregnancyandbaby.com)
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 or [www.nhsdirect.co.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.co.uk)
- SportEX Health - information on physical activity [www.sportex.net](http://www.sportex.net)

### Local information



A 'normal' pregnancy lasts for 38-42 weeks and is split into three trimesters:

Trimester 1 = 0-12 weeks

Trimester 2 = 13-28 weeks

Trimester 3 = 28-40+ weeks

### SAFETY AND BENEFITS

Studies have shown that if you exercise during pregnancy you can benefit from a whole host of improvements to both your own, as well as your baby's fitness and health.

This leaflet gives more details about these benefits as well as describes some particular strengthening exercises that will help you during your pregnancy.

### CHECK WITH A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL

Before starting a physical activity programme it is always sensible to get the advice of a qualified medical professional but this is particularly important if any of the following statements apply to you:

- If you are pregnant with more than one baby ie. twins
- If you are in your third trimester and the baby is in the breech position
- If you have regular or persistent contractions
- If you have any bleeding from your vagina or fluid loss
- If you have a history of spontaneous abortion or premature labour
- If you suffer from regular headaches, dizziness, blurred vision or excessive swelling of your hands and feet.

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# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DURING PREGNANCY

## How does physical activity help you during pregnancy?

- Regular moderate exercise is likely to be beneficial to both you and your baby during pregnancy so it is worth asking your GP surgery for information on antenatal exercise sessions offered in your area.
- As a result of participating in regular physical activity during your pregnancy, your baby is likely to be more alert and advanced with less excess fat.
- Physical activity helps to alleviate or reduce some of the symptoms of pregnancy such as tiredness and increases the ability to cope with everyday activities.
- You are likely to experience reduced stress and risk of depression as well as have a shorter, less complicated labour and quicker recovery if you have been physically active during your pregnancy.
- Physical activity can help increase your sense of self esteem and prevent excessive weight gain.
- You will have a better posture and stronger pelvic floor muscles as well as maintaining and improving your existing fitness level.
- In addition regular physical activity helps reduce high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol levels.

## What type of activity is best?

During pregnancy your body undergoes many physiological changes. Pregnancy hormones such as relaxin soften the ligaments and mean that your joints are less stable (see Staying safe on back page). Your posture, abdominal muscles and pelvic floor are particularly affected. The exercises below should be incorporated with some more stamina-type activities like walking and swimming for around 30 minutes on five or more days of the week.

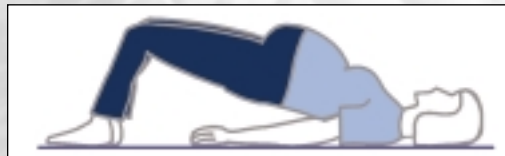
## Posture

By adopting good posture you are less likely to suffer muscular tension or strain joints and ligaments and may protect yourself against back problems.

### 1. Bridging (1st trimester)

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet hip width apart. Begin by performing a pelvic tilt, then lift your hips and buttocks off the floor until your knees and chest are in a

straight line. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 5-10 times.



### 2. Cat stretch (1st,2nd,3rd trimester)

Begin on your hands and knees, placing your knees hip width apart and hands shoulder

width apart. Arch your back along the length of your spine lowering your head between your arms. Hold for 5 seconds and then return to the starting position. Don't let your back sag when you return to the starting position.



## Abdominal muscles

The growth of your baby causes your abdominal muscles to stretch and weaken. After the first trimester you should not perform sit-ups. However, it is important to keep the 'core' abdominal muscles strong to help support the weight of the baby.

### 3. Pelvic Tilt (2nd,3rd trimester)

Stand with your back against the wall, legs shoulder width apart, heels away from the wall. Tilt your pelvis until your lower back comes into contact with the wall. Feel as if you are drawing your baby up and in towards you. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5-10 times.



### 4. Hip hitching (1st,2nd,3rd trimester)

Lie on your side with your top leg straight and bottom leg slightly bent. Rest head on your

lower arm. Keep a long, straight back (you may need a cushion underneath your bump for support). Raise your top leg slightly then use your lateral abdominal (waist) muscles to pull your hip towards your shoulder. It will feel as if you are shortening and then lengthening the top leg. Hold for a few seconds, then release. Repeat 5 times on both. Do not do this exercise if you feel any pain in your pelvic (hip) joints.



## Pelvic floor

The pelvic floor muscles include the groups of muscles around the back passage, the vagina and the urethra. These muscle groups can be contracted (pulled up) all together or one at a time.. You can do these pelvic floor exercises in all the trimesters.

### 5. Contract and release

Adopt a comfortable position lying, sitting or standing. Try not to squeeze your bottom or gluteal muscles. Draw up your pelvic floor muscles, contracting and holding them for 5 seconds, then release. Repeat 5-10 times.

### 6. The elevator

Imagine your pelvic floor muscles are an elevator. Slowly lift up through three levels, contracting and holding your muscles a little tighter each time. When you reach the top, slowly descend, stopping and holding at each level on the way down. Repeat 5 times.