

Prenatal Education

Key Messages for Ontario



Active Living

Key Messages

Physical activity has many physical and mental health benefits during pregnancy.

Physical activity during pregnancy can lead to:

- ▶ Less stress.
- ▶ More energy.
- ▶ More oxygen for your baby.
- ▶ Better posture.
- ▶ A healthy weight gain.
- ▶ Less risk of developing pregnancy-related diabetes or high blood pressure.
- ▶ An easier recovery after birth.

Speak to your health care provider before changing or beginning an exercise routine.

If you do not have medical conditions that prevent you from exercising during pregnancy and if you are already physically active (i.e., you exercise for 150 minutes per week at moderate or vigorous intensity), you can continue to accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week over a minimum of three days per week. Being active every day is encouraged. Include a variety of aerobic and resistance training activities to achieve greater benefits. Adding yoga or gentle stretching may also be beneficial.

Moderate-intensity exercise raises your heart rate and leaves you slightly out of breath. If you are unable to talk and carry on a conversation during exercise, is it too intense.

If you do not already exercise but would like to, it is best to gradually work up to at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise over a minimum of three days per week.

You don't have to go to the gym to be active. Physical activity can easily be added to your daily routine.

Being active is a fun way to meet new people and is a great way to spend time with your partner or friends. It can set the stage for active family living.

Some physical activities you may enjoy during pregnancy include:

- ▶ Walking.
- ▶ Jogging.
- ▶ Swimming.
- ▶ Dancing.
- ▶ Stationary bicycling.
- ▶ Housework.

You may also enjoy wellness activities such as meditation, visualization, and deep breathing. They can reduce your stress level and be useful during labour and birth to decrease the intensity of pain.

Not all activities are safe during pregnancy. High-intensity activities, heavy lifting, and activities which could cause you to fall or injure yourself should be avoided.

Physical activities which you should avoid during pregnancy include:

- ▶ Horseback riding.
- ▶ Downhill skiing.
- ▶ Hockey.
- ▶ Gymnastics.
- ▶ Mountain biking.
- ▶ Scuba diving.

After your fourth month (16 weeks) of pregnancy, change any exercises that you would normally do on your back. You may be able to do them on your side, or while you are standing or sitting. Lying on your back can decrease the amount of blood flow to your baby.

When you are exercising, listen to your body and know when to stop.

Being active takes slightly more effort during pregnancy. You may tire a bit faster than before. Your baby is growing, and this takes energy. Your body is also changing, which affects what you can do. You should not go over a specific heart rate zone which corresponds to your age, current activity level, and weight. Pregnancy is also not the time to train for an athletic competition.

During exercise, drink plenty of water and try not to get too hot. Avoid hot yoga, the use of hot tubs and saunas, and prolonged time periods outside in the sun.

Pelvic floor exercises, during pregnancy and after birth, can help reduce the risk of urinary incontinence.

Some women will experience urinary leakage during pregnancy or after birth. This can occur due to weakened pelvic floor muscles (the muscles between your anus and vagina).

You can do simple, daily pelvic floor exercises, such as Kegel exercises, throughout your pregnancy to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. Ask your health care provider how to do Kegel exercises effectively.

Learn more about exercise in pregnancy.

You can find out more about exercise in pregnancy from the following resources.

- ▶ Your health care provider
- ▶ Your local public health unit 1-866-532-3161
- ▶ oMama
www.omama.com