



Healthy Families Homebirth

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Exercising

Exercising throughout pregnancy can help tone your body and get ready for labor. Exercise has also been found to increase your immune function, help you get better sleep, recover faster, and feel better about yourself. Even small amount of exercise, several times a week, can improve overall health. So what are you waiting for- get moving!

Notes for exercising:

- Any type of exercise should include plenty of hydration- a glass of water before and after, and small drinks as you move. Make one of those drinks something with electrolytes to replace sodium lost from perspiration.
- Eat! The calories and nutrients you burn during exercise need to be replaced. The more aerobic your workout the more calories you need.
- Be kind to your joints. Your joints will be more flexible as your body prepares for labor. Avoid bouncing, jerking, jumping, or quick movements.
- Stick with low-impact aerobics- yoga, swimming, walking, and upper body workouts are ideal
- Keep up your Kegels!
- Keep it regular- even a quick walk around the block is better than packing all your exercise into one day and exhausting yourself. Do it at least 5 times a week!
- Build in time to relax into your routine. A few minutes to check into your body and relax every muscle can help you prepare for labor.
- Exercise or movement is a way to honor yourself. Take your time and enjoy these few pregnant months.
- The Preparing for Labor exercises can be done anytime during pregnancy, but especially to be looked at in the third trimester.

Warnings:

- Avoid hot environments to exercise in. Pregnancy increases your core body temperature. Your baby's environment is a degree warmer than you are. Hot tubs, Jacuzzis, saunas, and hot workout rooms- like hot yoga, should be avoided.
- Sports with a high rate of injury, such as skiing, snowboarding, roller derby, and skateboarding, should be avoided; unless you are high skilled at the activity and understand the possible risks.

This is general information. Please speak to your health care provider about your unique health needs.



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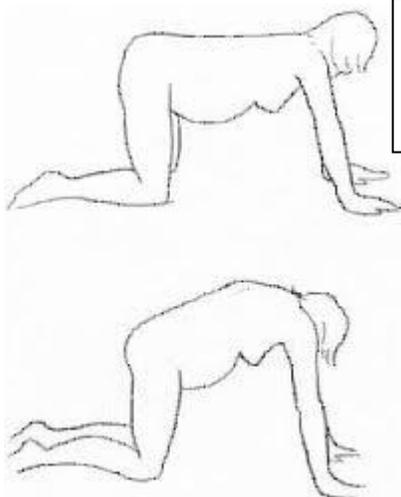
- Be aware of your body. If you notice signs of dizziness, pain, shortness of breath, bleeding, rapid heartbeat, sever back pain or pubic pain, STOP your activity immediately. Sit down, rest, and breathe. Ask for assistance from the instructor, if needed.

Preparing for Labor:

Beginning at about 36 weeks, you and your fetus should start getting ready for labor. Exercising in a way that gets your baby into an optimal fetal position can make the labor process go smoother. The best way for your baby to be born is for the back of his head facing the front of your body, or occiput anterior. Babies can be born in different positions, but occiput anterior is ideal for reduced back pain and time in labor. The key to these exercises are upright, forward leaning positions, with your knees lower than your pelvis. Avoid sitting in semi-reclined positions, like long car rides, and with crossed legs.

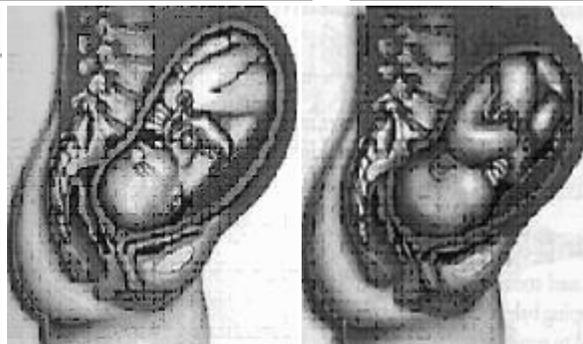
Some exercises to try (it may be helpful for someone to read to you while you try it on the first time):

- Cat- cow- sit on the floor on all fours- your hands and knees. Let your belly and head drop to the floor- just breathe and relax. Arch your back- like a cat- while your head and back of your butt reach for the floor. Breathe. Now relax your back and stretch your neck in front of you. (Tilting your head back may cause unnecessary strain on your neck.) Breathe. Do as many as feel comfortable.



Yes! You can feel baby's spine against your belly.

Oh no. You are likely having back pain or soreness and feel kicking in the front of your abdomen



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- Pelvis tilt is a way to bring awareness to your posture. Standing without shoes on, put both hands on your hips. Tilt your hips, in an exaggerated way, to the front. Now tilt your hips to the back, almost as if you're going to sit. Now stand normally again. Feel from the bone of your hip to the side of your butt. Can you feel your hips naturally tilting more to the front or the back? You want the hips to be closer to straight up and down. This can be a challenge when you have a big belly tugging at your low back or if you wear high heels often.
- Figure 8s- Stand with feet hip width apart. Be sure to keep your knees bent during this!!! Put your hands on your hips and move your hips in a figure 8 pattern- left side forward, right side back; then right side forward and left side back. Keep the movements, slow and steady. Feel free to turn up your favorite tunes and add your own moves too!
- Walking gets your pelvis rocking and lets gravity help move your baby to the right place.
- Going up and down stairs is a great way to get your pelvis to tilt properly. Doing two or three at a time are great for lunges and helping baby move down.
- Swimming will reduce the added weight and stress to your legs. Swim with a doggie paddle or breast stroke (your legs should kick, instead of a frog kick). This will encourage your baby to have his back on the outside of your belly, and not against your back.
- Prenatal yoga classes- These classes are generally designed to help your body relax and open up for labor. If these classes leave you feeling stressed or sweating too much, find one that is focused more on relaxation.

Other recommendations:

- Use your birth ball- Sit on your birth ball instead of the couch or lounge chairs- watching TV, in front of the computer, or knitting. Be sure that the size of the ball is right for you. Your knees should be lower or at the same height of your pelvis when sitting.
- Kegel exercises strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. To find the muscles, try to hold your urine while peeing. After using the bathroom, now that you know what the muscles feel like, try to tighten them, holding it for a few seconds, and relaxing them. Do breathe, but avoid getting your thighs, buttocks, or abdomen involved. As you strengthen these muscles, you can hold it for up to 30 seconds. Doing 10 long Kegels and up to 100 short Kegels a day, will tone these muscles, and help the baby rotate, and descend during labor.

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Further reading and exercise classes:

Essential Exercise During the Childbearing Year by Elizabeth Nobel

The Natural Pregnancy Book by Aviva Jill Romm

Sit Up and Take Notice by Pauline Scott

Gaiam videos Prenatal series

Dancing for Birth Classes

YMCA or local county recreation center

References:

Frye, A. (2010). *Holistic Midwifery: A comprehensive textbook for midwives in homebirth practice*. Portland, OR: Labrys Press.

Romm, A. J. (2003). *The natural pregnancy book: herbs, nutrition, and other holistic choices*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.

Swinney, B., & Anderson, T. (1996). *Eating expectantly: a practical and tasty approach to prenatal nutrition*. Deephaven, MN: Meadowbrook Press.

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