

C-Life Health Club Pregnancy and Postpartum Exercise Guidelines

Introduction

Regular exercise during pregnancy and postpartum offers numerous benefits for both physical and mental health. Engaging in physical activity can help reduce stress, improve sleep quality, alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety, boost energy levels, and enhance overall mood. Additionally, exercise supports physical health by maintaining cardiovascular fitness, strengthening muscles, and promoting flexibility and balance. At C-Life Health Club, we are committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for pregnant and postpartum members to stay active and healthy.

Pregnancy Policy

1. **Pre-Exercise Screening:** All pregnant members must complete a pre-exercise screening form and obtain approval from their obstetrician before participating in any exercise program.
2. **First Trimester (up to 12 weeks):** Pregnant members may participate in general gym and group fitness classes, including Reformer Pilates, with appropriate modifications as needed.
3. **Second and Third Trimesters (13 weeks and beyond):** Pregnant members are encouraged to engage in low-impact exercises and may continue to participate in general gym activities and specific prenatal exercise designed to accommodate their changing bodies and needs. Classes which are contraindicated to these recommendations include Reformer Pilates, Pilates (from 16 weeks), Maxx Fit, Tabata, HIT.

Exercise Recommendations

1. **Aerobic Exercise:** Aim for 150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week, spread across most days of the week. Activities such as walking, swimming, and stationary cycling are recommended.
2. **Strength Training:** Include two strength training sessions per week, focusing on major muscle groups. Use lighter weights and higher repetitions to avoid excessive strain.
3. **Pelvic Floor Exercises:** Perform pelvic floor exercises 3-4 times per week to maintain pelvic floor strength and function.
4. **Flexibility and Balance:** Incorporate gentle stretching and balance exercises to improve flexibility and stability. Yoga and Pilates can be beneficial, however avoid positions that involve lying flat on your back after the first trimester.
5. **Hydration and Nutrition:** Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water before, during, and after exercise. Ensure you are consuming a balanced diet to support your energy needs and overall health.
6. **Listen to Your Body:** Pay attention to your body's signals and avoid pushing yourself beyond your comfort level. If you experience any pain, dizziness, or discomfort, stop exercising and consult your healthcare provider.

It is advisable to avoid the following activities:

- High impact, jerky or ballistic movements
- Exercise intensities or duration that make the client feel hot, exhausted or sweat excessively

- Sudden changes of intensity and position
- Any exercise that involves breath holding or Valsalva manoeuvre
- Any exercise that places significant load on the abdominals or pelvic floor, including abdominal curls, sit ups, planks and hovers
- Stretching beyond comfortable range of movement to avoid overstretching due to increased joint and ligament flexibility
- Weight bearing activities beyond comfortable range of movement
- Exercises involving lying supine from 16 weeks onwards
- Exercises in stationary standing (especially upper body strengthening) that will increase the risk of fainting
- Contact activities (to minimise risk of falls and blows to the abdomen which may increase the risk of fetal trauma). Example activities include, but are not limited to, horse riding, downhill skiing, ice hockey, gymnastics or Olympic lifts³
- Any exercise that may cause or exacerbate any pregnancy related condition

Specific Exercise Examples for Pregnancy

1. **Walking:** A simple and effective way to stay active without putting too much strain on your body.
2. **Swimming:** Provides a full-body workout while being gentle on the joints.
3. **Prenatal Yoga:** Helps improve flexibility, balance, and relaxation.
4. **Stationary Cycling:** A safe way to maintain cardiovascular fitness.
5. **Modified Squats:** Strengthens the lower body while supporting the pelvic floor.
6. **Cat-Cow Stretch:** Helps relieve back tension and improve spinal flexibility.

Postpartum Exercise Guidelines

1. **Postpartum Recovery:** Allow your body adequate time to recover after childbirth. Consult your healthcare provider before resuming any exercise program, typically around 6 weeks postpartum for vaginal births and 8-10 weeks for caesarean births.
2. **Gradual Return to Exercise:** Start with gentle activities such as walking and gradually increase the intensity and duration of your workouts as your body heals and regains strength.
3. **Pelvic Floor and Core Strengthening:** Focus on pelvic floor exercises and gentle core strengthening to support recovery and improve stability. Avoid high-impact activities and heavy lifting until you have regained sufficient strength.
4. **Breastfeeding Considerations:** If you are breastfeeding, ensure you stay hydrated and consume enough calories to support both your exercise routine and milk production.
5. **Listen to Your Body:** Pay attention to how your body feels and avoid pushing yourself too hard. If you experience any pain, discomfort, or unusual symptoms, stop exercising and consult your healthcare provider.
6. **Support and Supervision:** Whenever possible, exercise under the supervision of a qualified personal trainer who is aware of your postpartum status and can provide appropriate modifications and support.

Specific Exercise Examples for Postpartum

1. **Walking:** A gentle way to reintroduce physical activity.
2. **Pelvic Tilts:** Helps strengthen the lower back and core.
3. **Kegel Exercises:** Strengthens the pelvic floor muscles.
4. **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Supports core stability and relaxation.
5. **Gentle Yoga:** Focuses on stretching and relaxation.
6. **Bodyweight Exercises:** Such as modified push-ups and bridges to gradually build strength.

Mental Health Benefits

1. **Stress Relief:** Exercise helps reduce stress levels by releasing endorphins, which are natural mood lifters.
2. **Improved Sleep:** Regular physical activity can promote better sleep quality, which is crucial for overall well-being.
3. **Reduced Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety:** Engaging in physical activity during pregnancy and postpartum can help alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety.
4. **Enhanced Mood and Energy Levels:** Exercise boosts energy levels and enhances mood, helping you feel more positive and energized.
5. **Social Interaction:** Participating in group fitness classes provides an opportunity for social interaction, which can be beneficial for mental health.

Safety Tips for Exercising

1. **Warm-Up and Cool-Down:** Always start with a warm-up to prepare your body for exercise and end with a cool-down to help your body recover.
2. **Stay Hydrated:** Drink plenty of water before, during, and after exercise to stay hydrated.
3. **Avoid Overheating:** Exercise in a cool, well-ventilated area and avoid exercising in hot or humid conditions.
4. **Wear Appropriate Clothing:** Choose comfortable, breathable clothing and supportive footwear.
5. **Monitor Intensity:** Keep your exercise intensity at a moderate level. You should be able to carry on a conversation while exercising.
6. **Avoid High-Risk Activities:** Steer clear of high-impact activities, contact sports, and exercises with a high risk of falling.
7. **Listen to Your Body:** Pay attention to your body's signals and stop exercising if you experience pain, dizziness, or discomfort.
8. **Consult Your Healthcare Provider:** Always consult your healthcare provider before starting or continuing an exercise program during pregnancy and postpartum.

FAQ

1. **Can I start exercising if I wasn't active before pregnancy?**
 - Yes, but start slowly and gradually increase your activity level. Always consult your healthcare provider before beginning any new exercise program.
2. **What types of exercises should I avoid during pregnancy?**

- Avoid high-impact activities, contact sports, and exercises that involve lying flat on your back after the first trimester. Also, avoid activities with a high risk of falling.
- 3. How can I modify exercises during pregnancy?**
 - Use lighter weights, reduce the range of motion, and avoid exercises that cause discomfort. Avoid lying on your back for extended period and modify by incorporating side lying positions. Your instructor can provide specific modifications based on your needs.
 - 4. When can I resume exercise after giving birth?**
 - Typically, you can resume exercise around 6 weeks postpartum for vaginal births and 8-10 weeks for caesarean births, however always consult your healthcare provider first.
 - 5. Can I do high-intensity workouts during pregnancy?**
 - High-intensity workouts are generally not recommended during pregnancy. Focus on moderate-intensity exercises and always listen to your body. Consult your healthcare provider for personalised advice.
 - 6. Is it safe to do abdominal exercises while pregnant?**
 - Some abdominal exercises are safe during pregnancy, however avoid those that involve lying flat on your back after the first trimester. Focus on gentle core strengthening exercises and consult your instructor for modifications.
 - 7. How often should I exercise during pregnancy?**
 - Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week, spread across most days of the week. Adjust the frequency and intensity based on your comfort and healthcare provider's recommendations.
 - 8. What should I do if I experience discomfort or pain during exercise?**
 - Stop exercising immediately and consult your healthcare provider. It's important to listen to your body and avoid pushing yourself too hard.
 - 9. Can I continue to lift weights during pregnancy?**
 - Yes, but use lighter weights and higher repetitions to avoid excessive strain. Focus on maintaining good form and avoid heavy lifting.

For more detailed information, please refer to the RANZCOG guidelines on exercise during pregnancy and postpartum

1. RANZCOG Exercise During Pregnancy: <https://ranzocg.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Exercise-During-Pregnancy-Guidance.pdf>
2. ACOG Guidelines on Exercise After Pregnancy: <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/exercise-after-pregnancy>
3. Mayo Clinic Guidelines on Exercise After Pregnancy: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/exercise-after-pregnancy/art-20044596>.

