



# I'm pregnant.

## Should I exercise?

[www.healthypregnancyBC.ca](http://www.healthypregnancyBC.ca)

Yes, the most up-to-date advice is that physical activity is safe during pregnancy. In fact, there are *more* health risks if you are *not* active. Being physically active most days is a part of a healthy pregnancy.

### If you *were not* physically active before pregnancy:

Many women think of pregnancy as a great time to make new healthy habits. Use this time to make daily physical activity a life-long habit for both you and your child.

#### Start easy and progress gradually:

- Talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program
- The type of activity you choose is up to you – choose activities that you enjoy.
- Build physical activity into your daily routine. Plan how you will include it in your day and week.
- Start with mild activities such as walking and swimming. Even 5 minutes a day will help. For example, take the stairs instead of the elevator or get off the bus a few stops early and walk the rest of the way.
- Gradually increase the time you're active to 30 minutes a day. This can be all at once or as 10 minute blocks of time.

### If you *were* physically active before pregnancy:

- Keep being active most days of the week.
- If you are not feeling up to your usual activities, find ways to include activity into your daily routine. For example, park your car at the far end of the parking lot. Being active for even 10 minutes at a time counts.

Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity most days.

#### Being active can:

- improve your mood
- decrease stress
- increase your energy levels
- promote a healthy weight
- promote better sleep
- increase your muscle tone, strength, and endurance
- prepare your body for birth
- speed up your recovery after labour and delivery

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### Tips for Exercising Safely

#### Don't overdo it.

You should be able to carry on a normal conversation while you are active.

#### Modify or replace weight-bearing activities.

Modify or replace activities such as running, high-impact aerobics, hiking, and tennis as your pregnancy progresses.

#### Hormones make your joints looser in pregnancy.

In your second and third trimesters, avoid exercises that involve quick changes of direction.

#### As your pregnancy progresses, your centre of gravity will shift and you may lose your balance more easily.

When doing exercises that involve balance, have something nearby to hold onto, for example a chair, if you start to lose your balance.

#### Keep cool and hydrated.

Drink lots of water before, during, and after physical activity to avoid overheating and dehydration. Avoid being active outdoors on very hot or humid days.

### Taking care of myself

I wasn't the fitness-type before I was pregnant. But I wanted to do everything I could to be healthy for my baby. So, I started going to the prenatal yoga class at my local Rec. centre. I loved how de-stressed I felt after class. And, I've met other Moms-to-be. Now two or three of us meet up and walk together on Mondays and Wednesdays. What started out as something I was doing for the baby ended up being one of my favourite parts of my day.

# Posture During Pregnancy

Your posture changes as your baby grows and your weight increases. Proper positioning during your daily activities helps prevent backache and other discomforts associated with pregnancy.

## Standing

- stand tall
- lift up through your breast bone
- keep feet hip width apart
- keep knees soft, not locked
- tighten core muscles



**Incorrect**



**Correct**

## Lying

- rest on your side with knees bent
- use pillows for support; between knees and under belly as needed (use a body pillow)
- when moving in bed, tighten core muscles to turn
- get in and out of bed from side lying



## Walking

- stand tall
- take small steps
- keep feet hip width apart
- tighten core muscles
- wear comfortable, supportive shoes



## Sitting

- sit well back in a firm chair
- avoid crossing legs
- support the small of your back with a pillow
- relax your legs



**Incorrect**



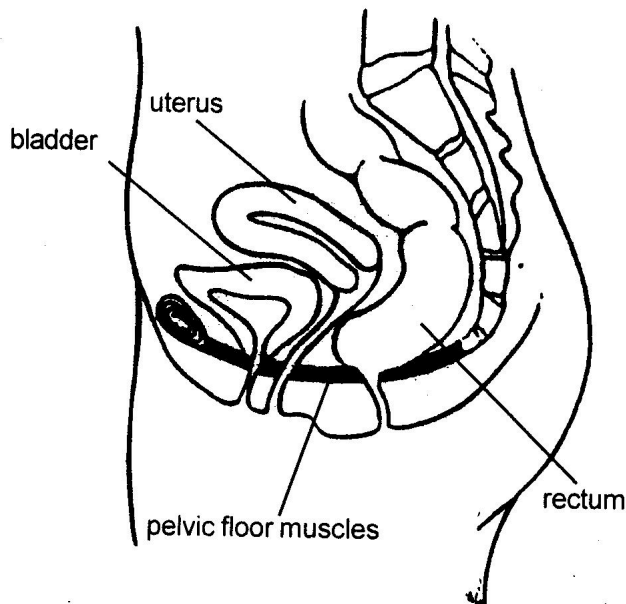
**Correct**

**CORE MUSCLES** include transverse abdominus (lower abs) and the pelvic floor muscles

# Pelvic Floor Muscles

## Where is your pelvic floor?

Your pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles which attach to the bottom of the pelvis. They provide support for your bladder, uterus and rectum.



## How is your pelvic floor affected by pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your pelvic floor muscles may become stretched due to the changes in hormones and the weight of your growing baby.

## Why Train your pelvic floor?

- improves bladder and bowel control
- improves support for your pelvic organs
- helps your core muscle strength

## How to find your pelvic floor muscles

To strengthen your pelvic floor muscles tighten up the muscles as if to stop the flow of urine or as if to stop gas from escaping. Feel the muscles lift up into your body. You should never push down.

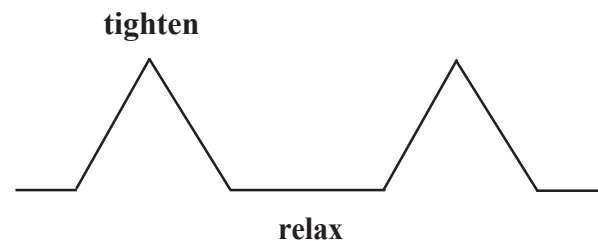
If you are having difficulty finding these muscles, try this while sitting on the toilet. Try to stop the flow of urine for 1-2 seconds. Then let go and allow the bladder to empty completely. **Use this as a test only, not an exercise.**

# Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises (Kegel's)

Try the following two exercises:

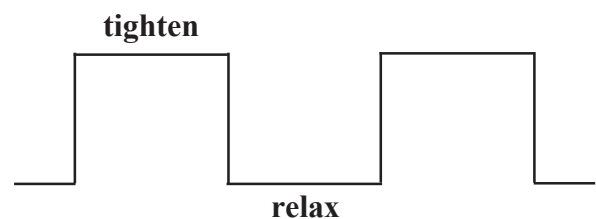
## 1. Speed'ems:

Pull up and in quickly and strongly. Let go. Did you feel the muscle lift? Try not to use your glutes. Try it again. Try doing several in a row until your muscles begin to feel a little tired. Try 10-30 in a row. This exercise helps top leakage when you cough, sneeze, lift or laugh.



## 2. Hold'ems:

Tighten up quickly and strongly as you did with the Speed'ems. Try to hold for a few seconds. Pull in more and more. Don't let go. Remember to breathe. Do another and see if you can hold longer. Maybe you can only hold for 3 seconds. Work at that for now. Eventually, you want to increase your ability to hold 10 seconds while you continue to breathe.



### **Remember:**

- do Kegel exercises 1-2 times a day
- start with 3-5 repetitions and do more when the exercises feel easy
- breathe normally
- Kegel's are easier to do sitting or lying down
- do a Kegel whenever you cough, sneeze, lift or laugh

## General Guidelines for Exercise

1. Avoid jumping and jarring activities and rapid changes in direction.
2. Avoid overstretching.
3. Avoid holding your breath when you exercise.
4. Begin exercise at a low intensity and gradually progress/maintain activity levels.
5. Rise up from the floor slowly to avoid dizziness.
6. Be aware of symptoms if exercising on your back. If you feel short of breath, nauseated, dizzy or unwell change position.
7. Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after exercise to prevent dehydration.
8. Extra energy is needed during exercise and pregnancy. Make sure you are getting enough calories.
9. Listen to your own body. Stop exercising and seek medical attention if you experience any of the following or if you are unsure if you should continue exercising.
  - increased pain
  - uterine contractions
  - vaginal bleeding
  - leaking fluid
  - dizziness/faintness
  - shortness of breath
  - chest pain

Be sure to contact your physician/healthcare provider if you have questions about any of the above.

Source: Joint SOGC/CSEP Clinical Practice Guideline  
"Exercise in Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period"

## Stretching & Strengthening

During pregnancy, muscle imbalances can occur. Certain groups of muscles tend to shorten and tighten while others lengthen and weaken. Stretching and strengthening can restore muscle balance and prevent discomfort.

### Stretching

- gently warm up prior to stretching (e.g. walk 5-10 minutes prior to stretching)
- hold each stretch 20-30 seconds, repeat 2-3 times
- you should feel a stretch without pain
- ensure proper posture
- do not overstretch
- breathe!

### Ideas for stretches during your pregnancy

#### *Triceps*

- hold elbow with opposite hand
- gently pull behind your head
- stretch should be felt at the back of your upper arm



#### *Ribcage/back*

- extend arm over head and reach towards one side
- stretch should be felt along the ribcage of your extended arm



### ***Mid-back 1***

- move on to your heels pushing your chest toward the floor
- stretch should be felt in your mid-back region



### ***Mid-back 2***

- with feet hip width apart, bend knees and shift weight backwards, push your chest towards the floor
- stretch should be felt in your mid-back region
- to feel a greater stretch on your side, cross one arm over the other



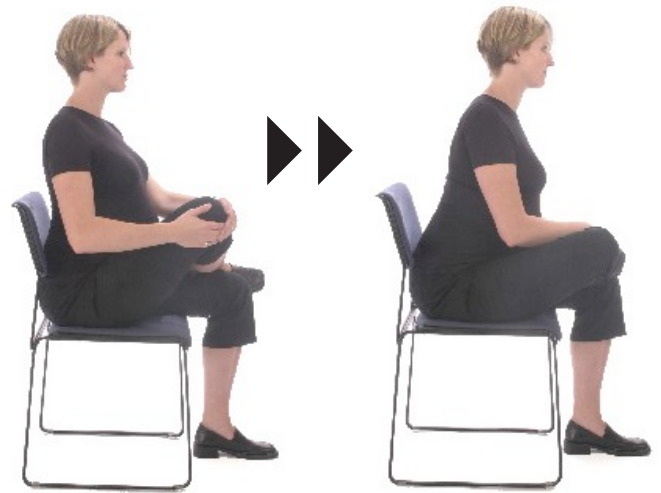
### ***Buttock***

- in side lying, bring your knee towards your chest and hold
- stretch should be felt in your buttock and lower back



### ***Buttock***

- cross ankle over opposite knee with your back straight
- lean forward through your hips
- stretch should be felt in your buttock



### ***Calf (gastroc)***

- keep back leg straight with heel down, shift weight forward
- stretch should be felt in the calf of your back leg



### ***Calf (soleus)***

- bend back knee with heel down
- stretch should be felt in the calf of your back leg

### *Hip*

- with back straight, shift weight forward
- stretch should be felt in the front of the hip of the back leg



### *Hamstrings*

- with back straight, lean forward through your hips
- stretch should be felt through the back of your leg and/or calf

## Strengthening

### *Pelvic Tilt*

- Pull in your abdominal muscles, tuck buttock under and flatten your back. Hold for 3-5 seconds and then relax. Let the curve of your spine return.
- Try this exercise in side lying, sitting, on your hands and knees or standing against a wall.



### ***Transverse Abdominus (TA) Activation***

- Lie on side or on your back (with knees bent) if comfortable. Progress to doing this exercise while on your hands and knees.
- To find the muscle:
  - Place fingers on lower abdominal muscles (find your hip bones and move fingers one inch in towards your belly button).
  - Draw in the muscles below your belly button while breathing out.
  - You should feel a small to moderate amount of tension develop under your finger tips as you contract your TA (you should not feel it push up against your fingers).
- Keep breathing.
- Think light and gentle.
- Hold for 5-10 seconds, repeat 5 times.



### **Everyday Tips** (and other things to think about)

1. Include relaxation as part of your daily routine. Take 10-20 minutes for yourself to rest and refresh.
2. You can use heat (e.g. hot pack or gel pack) or ice to help relieve lower back discomfort. Ensure that the heat or ice source is not in direct contact with your skin (e.g. wrap in a towel).
3. When lifting or carrying, tighten your core muscles, hold load close to you and use your legs not your back to lift the object. Avoid twisting movements and get help with carrying heavy loads.
4. Pace yourself. Start activities slowly. Progress difficulty or duration of the activity if you are pain free.
5. Wear a supportive bra to help prevent upper back pain.
6. **Daily activities:**
  - working surfaces should be at hip height when standing
  - if standing for a prolonged period of time, rest one foot up on a stool (e.g. when washing dishes)
  - stand and walk 'tall'
  - sit to dress yourself and to put on your shoes
  - change positions frequently
7. What to look for in **baby equipment:**
  - strollers: think about adjustable handles, how you are using it (walking, running), weight, does it fold
  - change tables: hip height working surfaces are ideal
  - baby carriers; look for supportive and adjustable straps



## Activity Ideas



- brisk walking



- stairs



- stationary bike

## Activity Calendar

*\*Remember to do your Kegel's every day.*

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Example Schedule	Walk 2x20 minutes		Swim or Aquafit Class	Prenatal, yoga or pilates class		Walk 2x20 minutes	
Your 1st Trimester							
Your 2nd Trimester							
Your 3rd Trimester							