



“...go ahead and exercise and reap the benefits of good health...”



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## Excercising During Pregnancy

### 10 THINGS TO BE AWARE OF

**AT CLEVELAND PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSOCIATES**, we work closely with area physicians to address several conditions specific to women including; pre and post partum related issues, urinary incontinence, as well as a program for prevention and treatment of osteoporosis. Today, our focus will be on exercising during pregnancy. Years ago pregnancy was treated more like an illness. Women were restricted from physical activities at a time when they really needed their strength and endurance. Now, moderate activity during pregnancy is considered not only safe, but extremely beneficial for most expectant mothers and their babies. Walking, swimming, stationary bicycling, jogging, or low impact aerobics are all examples of cardiovascular exercises that improve the function of your heart and lungs. First and foremost, before starting on an exercise program during pregnancy, it is important to get medical clearance from your physician. If you are having problems with your pregnancy, activity may need to be restricted to ensure that you and your baby are not at risk. Once you have the blessings of your physician, here are a few things that you need to be aware of:

**1)** Good sleep habits and a healthy diet will contribute to the success of an exercise program. In addition, be sure to drink plenty of fluids during the day (8-10 glasses of water, juice, or milk). Drink before and after each workout.

**2)** Be alert to overheating your body. Raising your body temperature more than 1 ½ to 2° F. is considered dangerous. Excessive exercise or exercising in a hot environment could cause overheating. When this happens, circulation is directed to the skin so that body heat can be released through evaporation. This may reduce circulation to the fetus and deprive the baby of oxygen and other nutrients. Stop and cool down if you feel excessively warm, are perspiring more than normal and/or are feeling dizzy or weak.

**3)** Do not exercise to the level of exhaustion. During exercise you should be able to carry on a conversation with another person without becoming breathless. Use the “talk test” to monitor whether or not you need to slow down.

**4)** Invest in a good support bra and supportive footwear.

**5)** Listen to your body! Never ignore feelings of discomfort or pain. Contact your physician if you feel regular contractions or bleeding starts during or after exercise.

**6)** Listen to your body again! Nausea and fatigue may accompany you 24 hours a day during first tri-

mester and it may limit what you feel like doing. Try just taking daily walks and when your energy level increases you can raise your exercise level. During the third trimester, regardless of your fitness level, you may need to taper off on your exercise routine. With increased body weight and a slightly decreased rate of blood flow from the heart, you may find it more difficult to sustain your regular activity level. You may also start to experience groin pain with weight bearing activities such as walking, jogging, and low impact aerobics. Switching to swimming or riding a stationary bicycle may be necessary to alleviate this discomfort. Both exercises will still provide the workout you desire.

**7)** Stretching before and after exercise is important. Care must be taken to stretch at a controlled rate and within the limits of the elastic state of your muscles and ligaments. During pregnancy your joints are looser due to hormonal changes so be careful not to overstretch. Do not hold your breath while stretching. Relax, stretching should feel good!

**8)** Make sure that you take the time to cool down following exercise. Walk around for a few minutes and then stretch out the muscles that have been used during exercise. If you stop exercise abruptly and flop into the nearest chair without a cool down you increase the risk of injury and decrease the return of blood to your heart.

**9)** Pay special attention to your posture and your balance during exercise. With an expanding bustline and waistline, your neck and back muscles have to work harder to maintain an erect posture. Strengthening these muscles, as well as the abdominal muscles, is important for good posture. Be aware throughout the day of keeping your head and shoulders, back and your buttocks tucked under to prevent a “swayback” posture. Balance may also be a problem during the last trimester. Take care to be on even ground during exercise.

**10)** Activities to abstain from during any phase of pregnancy are scuba diving, horseback riding, contact sports, and downhill or water skiing.

If you have any questions about these issues, or if you are wondering if physical therapy intervention would be beneficial for you, contact our office at **704-471-0001** or speak with your physician. Remember, being physically fit can help with the mental and physical stress of labor and delivery. So if you have your doctor’s blessings, go ahead and exercise and reap the benefits of good health for yourself and your growing baby. \*