

Staying Fit

Your body will go through a great deal of change as your baby grows. Here are some things you can do to make sure you feel your best and to avoid some of the discomforts that sometimes occur.

Pay attention to posture

As the weight in the front of your body increases, it will be important to pay attention to your posture. This will help prevent backaches and fatigue. Remind yourself as often as possible to sit or stand correctly. Don't sit slumped with legs crossed. Sit in a firm chair for support. When you are standing, make sure your weight is even on both feet. If you need to stand for a period of time, try to put one foot on a small stool or put one foot slightly forward. Change your position often. Stand with shoulders back, chest lifted, chin tucked, knees slightly bent, and feet apart.

You can also use a “pelvic tilt” to help support your back as your baby grows. Doing a pelvic tilt means pushing the lower curve of your spine backward, away from your growing abdomen. To see what a good pelvic tilt feels like, stand with your back against a flat wall with your knees slightly bent. Imagine there is a string pulling your belly button toward the wall. As you flatten your lower back against the wall, you are doing a pelvic tilt.

Some people use special supports for the growing abdomen as pregnancy progresses, such as an “abdominal sling” or “pregnancy cradle.” Your obstetric provider can give you more information about these devices.

Be aware of changes in balance

You also may find that the changes in weight make you feel awkward or even clumsy. If so, you are not alone. Accidents such as slips and falls are common in pregnancy. This is because the new weight in your belly changes your body's center of gravity. Although you will naturally make adjustments in how you move in order to stay balanced, be aware that your sense of balance is changing. Be careful going up and down stairs or walking on slippery surfaces. And be sure to wear only low-heeled shoes. If you fall, please let your obstetric provider know.

Get regular exercise

If you've been working out regularly for a long while, there is usually no need to stop during pregnancy. Talk with your obstetric provider about the kind of exercise you may do and about what level of exertion is okay for you. You should not exercise to the point where you become exhausted.

If you haven't been active before pregnancy, now is not the time to begin a vigorous exercise program. But there are safe, easy exercises you can do to help you feel better and maintain your health and stamina.

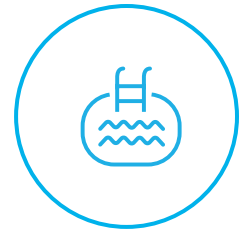


Walking and swimming, for example, can be done throughout your pregnancy, even if you are not used to exercising. Start slowly and work at a pace that is comfortable for you.

(If you are worried about chlorine in swimming pools, please know that there is no evidence that the chlorine causes any harm to you or your baby.)

As you exercise, please remember the importance of the “warm-up” and “cool-down” phases of your session. A good idea at any time, these practices help avoid abrupt changes in your heart rate and help you avoid injury. Also, be sure to drink plenty of water during and after your work-out session.

Please stay out of saunas and hot tubs at your health club or at home. These are not safe to use during pregnancy. The hot temperatures are not good for you or your developing baby. It’s okay to take a warm bath at home. Just make sure the water isn’t steaming hot.



Strengthen your pelvic floor

The pelvic floor refers to the muscles in your genital area. It includes the muscles around your vagina, urethra (urinary opening), and anus (bowel opening). Doing exercises, called Kegels, to strengthen these muscles helps support the area under the weight of your baby. Doing Kegels may help you keep control of your bladder during and after pregnancy and can also help prepare you for labor.

To do Kegels, follow these steps:

- First, you need to become aware of the muscles you need to strengthen. To “find” these muscles, imagine you are trying to stop the flow of urine or trying to stop yourself from passing gas. The muscles you contract to perform these actions are your pelvic floor muscles.
- Now you need to practice contracting these muscles. Contract slowly for a count of 10, or 15 if you can. Then, as you release the contraction, again count slowly to 10 or 15. That is one exercise.
- Repeat the exercise 10 times.
- Do a set of 10 Kegels several times a day. Try to work up to 3-4 sets of Kegels each day.
- Don’t be discouraged if you have problems with urine leakage as your pregnancy progresses. Kegels may help to decrease, but not eliminate, urine leakage during pregnancy. If urine leakage is severe, please tell your provider.