

**East Carolina University School of Medicine
Department of Family Medicine
Eastern Carolina Family Practice Center**

EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY

There are many benefits of exercise and physical activity during pregnancy. This handout will help you and your doctor decide what activities are appropriate for you during your pregnancy.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY

- * Better circulation in your body which helps to prevent swelling and helps get more blood and nutrients to the mother and the baby.
- * Improved posture which can help the mother to handle the postural stress of carrying her baby, even late in the pregnancy.
- * Improvement or maintenance of cardiovascular fitness. Many women have been able to maintain or even improve their level of physical fitness, making it much easier to get back into activity after the birth of their baby.
- * Many women report that exercise helped them feel more prepared for labor and decreased their anxiety about labor.

YOU SHOULD NOT EXERCISE IF YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- * heart disease
- * blood clots
- * pregnancy-induced hypertension (high blood pressure during pregnancy)
- * preterm rupture of membranes (your water is leaking or broke early)
- * preterm labor during this pregnancy or other pregnancies
- * incompetent cervix
- * bleeding during your 2nd and/or 3rd trimester
- * intrauterine growth retardation
- * thyroid disease
- * pulmonary, or breathing, disease

WARNING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Stop activity and notify your doctor immediately if you experience any of the following:

- * vaginal bleeding
- * contractions
- * nausea and/or vomiting
- * dizziness or faintness
- * difficulty walking
- * decreased fetal movement (baby is not moving as much as before)
- * palpitations or rapid heart rate
- * numbness in any part of your body
- * problems with your vision

EXERCISE GUIDELINES

Please discuss your exercise with your doctor before starting an exercise program. Some general guidelines to follow include:

- 1. Intensity** --- Decrease the intensity of your exercise by 25% as compared to what you were doing before you were pregnant.
- 2. Heart Rate** --- Your heart rate should not go above 140 beats per minute. Ask your doctor or nurse to teach you how to count your heart rate.
- 3. Temperature** --- Be careful to not become overheated. Be careful if you are exercising in a hot place or doing an activity that could make you become overheated.
- 4. Time** --- Moderate activity should not last more than 30 minutes. Be sure to add in some low-intensity exercise and rest periods.
- 5. Position** --- Avoid lying on your back for more than 5 minutes after you are in your 2nd trimester. Lying on your back allows the weight of the baby to press on some of your major blood vessels.
- 6. Frequency** --- Exercise should be done at least three times a week and should include a warm-up and cool-down period.

GUIDELINES FOR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Jogging --- may be continued moderately, but should not be started as a new activity during pregnancy. Watch out for joint pain. Recommendation is 2 miles or less per day.

Aerobics --- avoid high-impact or step aerobics. Look out for joint pain. Avoid exercises that involve lying on your back for more than 5 minutes.

Bicycling --- this is a great activity and is one that can be started during pregnancy. In the 3rd trimester you may need to switch to a stationary bike due to problems with balance.

Weight lifting --- can be continued during pregnancy. Use light weights and moderate repetitions. Avoid heavy resistance. Work with a trainer at your health club who can offer alternative exercises to some of the weight machines.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING DURING PREGNANCY

Downhill skiing

Water skiing

Gymnastics

Horseback riding

Scuba diving

High impact aerobics

ANY CONTACT SPORTS