

Exercising and eating healthy throughout pregnancy is crucial to the woman and child's well-being. Recovery from childbirth is much faster for women who are fit than for women who aren't. Follow these tips for a safe and effective exercise program to use throughout pregnancy and beyond. After all, staying fit should be a lifetime commitment.

## Planning A Safe Prenatal Exercise Program



Being pregnant doesn't mean being fat. It doesn't have to mean being tired all the time, nor does it mean looking dumpy and saggy as a new mother. The way you feel [terrific or fatigued] and the way you look [sleek or bulgy] depend to a great extent to what actions you take during pregnancy regarding diet and exercise. By eating a wide variety of wholesome foods and by exercising aerobically on a regular basis, you can maintain or improve your fitness and health during this time of extra demands on your body.

Decide how you want to look and feel after delivery. Then accept the challenge of making necessary changes in eating and exercise. That's the first step. Look at your schedule and make changes to include sensible eating and an exercise program. The two go hand in hand. Just because you are pregnant doesn't mean you're fragile. Give your exercise program top priority. Plan your day around your exercise program, not the other way around.

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This section describes a safe and effective fitness program for pregnant women at any level of fitness. The emphasis is on aerobic exercise, with some discussion of the other important components of a complete program- stretching and strengthening exercises.

## BABY GIFTS & GIFT BASKETS

Even if you aren't pregnant at the moment, staying fit is healthy for you and your children no matter what your age. Most of the steps outlined in this article are useful for all women – pregnant or not.

[Baby Gifts and Gift Baskets](#) provides timely and practical information for new moms, as well as gift ideas for pregnancy, baby showers, and to celebrate birth:

### New Baby Gift Ideas

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## **Starting an Exercise Program for the First Time**

Becoming fit during pregnancy requires safe, regular, sustained, moderate exercise—not embarking on a new sport or doing strenuous workouts. Even if you have never exercised regularly before, you can safely begin a workout program during pregnancy. The safest and most productive activities during pregnancy [especially for the woman exercising for the first time] are swimming and brisk walking. They are best because they can usually be continued until almost the day of delivery, and carry little risk of injury that would prevent further exercising. All you need before beginning is a sound program, appropriate clothing, and a health clearance from your personal physician.

## **Guide for Safe and Effective Exercise**

For anyone engaged in an exercise program, it is important to know if you are under or overworking your heart. If you underwork your heart muscle, you won't build stamina or endurance. If you are overworking your heart, you could become short of breath, dizzy, nauseated, or faint.

During pregnancy, it is especially important not to overwork. There are many internal body changes taking place that require oxygen and energy. In addition to the fact that you are growing a whole new person! That is why you should learn how to measure your body's responses to exercise.

One sign of overworking aerobically is shortness of breath. If you are working at just the right pace, you should be able to carry on a normal conversation while exercising [the "talk test"]. But, to be more accurate, you can learn to use your own pulse to tell you exactly how your body is responding to exercise.

## **Taking Your Pulse**

Your pulse varies according to your activity level. It is lowest when you are least active. It also varies to response to illness and emotions. Your pulse can tell you about your physical fitness level, too. The more fit you are, the lower your resting pulse rate. Most women have a resting pulse rate of seventy-two, to eighty beats per minute [bpm], but this may decrease as their level of fitness improves. During pregnancy, the resting pulse normally varies within the same day and from day to day. As pregnancy advances, the pulse rate increases just slightly.


There are many pulse locations you can use, including the ones at your temples, your wrists and inside your upper arms. Do not use the carotid artery, [the pulse at the side of your throat]. Pressing this artery often alters the pulse beat, giving an inaccurate reading. Also, if you should accidentally press too hard or "massage" your neck trying to locate the pulse [especially during a workout], you may alter or decrease blood flow to the brain, making yourself feel faint or dizzy. Never take your pulse with your thumb. There is a pulse in your thumb and it is easy to confuse that pulse with the one in the artery you are trying to measure.

For practice, try to find the pulse in your wrist right now. To locate it, look on the thumb side, just below the small round bone on the side. Press firmly with your index and middle fingers. You should feel it beating. If not, get up and move briskly around the room for a couple of minutes and try it again. Practice several times during non-exercise times to become proficient at locating and counting your pulse.

## Pulse Monitoring During your Workout

Three or four times during your workout, monitor your pulse. If you are attending an aerobic dance or exercise class with an instructor, monitor your own pulse whether or not the instructor has the entire class doing it. You should check your pulse after each aerobic dance or exercise segment, approximately every four minutes. After a while, you will be able to 'read your body' and will know when your pulse is at the right level. You will then be able to check your pulse less frequently. But at first, be consistent in checking your pulse often.

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Try to keep moving while you check your pulse. It will take practice at becoming proficient at doing this, but it is very important. Each time you stand still to take your pulse, it drops or changes. At the same time, the blood has a tendency to pool in the lower part of your body, affecting the blood pressure, and you may become dizzy or lightheaded. So keep moving to get an accurate pulse. [Of course if biking is your aerobic activity, you will have to stop to take your pulse. "No- hands" biking is not a good idea! Try jogging in place to keep your pulse rate up.

The most precise way to count your pulse is with a digital watch turned face up on the inside of your left wrist. Place the index and middle fingers of your right hand on your left wrist, finding your pulse beat. Keep moving as you begin counting [to yourself] how many times you feel the beat. The first beat is called zero, then one, two, three, and so on. For six seconds count each beat. Then simply place a zero after the number of your count. For example if your count is twelve your pulse is 120 bpm.

### Finding Your Target Heart Rate Zone

Which pulse range is right for you? In order to improve your heart muscle and receive the other benefits of exercise, you must keep your pulse within your individual "target" heart rate zone. This target zone [in pregnancy and until approximately twelve weeks after delivery] is achieved when the heart is beating at between sixty and seventy percent of your safe maximum attainable heart rate [SHR].

A formula is used to determine each person's target zone. 220 [which is considered the highest pulse] minus your age equals your SHR Multiply that by sixty or seventy percent to get the limits of your target zone. The chart that follows contains the

target zones for pregnant women of all ages. Use it to determine your own target zone. If you cannot carry on a conversation in your target zone, you should reduce your activity, lowering your pulse to the level at which you are able to converse comfortably.

Use your target zone to help you regulate your activity during exercise. If your pulse is below your target zone, you need to work harder. If it is above your target zone, you are working too hard for your fitness level; you need to slow your activity to slow your pulse down to your target zone.

### **Target Heart Rate Zones for Pregnant Women and New Mothers**

Age	Target Heart Rate [in beats/minute]
15	123-140
20	120-140
21	119-139
22	118-138
23	117-137
24	117-137
25	116-136
26	115-135
27	115-135
28	113-134
29	113-133
30	113-133
31	112-132
32	111-131
33	110-130
34	110-130
35	109-129
36	108-128
37	108-128
38	107-127
39	106-126
40	106-126
41	105-125
42	104-124

\*Target heart rate is calculated at sixty percent to seventy percent of the safe maximum attainable heart rate. In pregnancy, maximum heart rate should never exceed 140 beats per minute.

Stamina and endurance are achieved sooner by working at the lower end of your target zone, not the higher. Therefore, don't try to rush yourself to fitness by overworking, because it doesn't work and could cause harm.

Remember that your target zone is just for you. If you haven't exercised regularly before, you may have to do very little to zoom your pulse up. The more fit you become, the harder you will have to work to get your pulse in the target zone. Do not compare yourself with others; there is no norm to achieve. Each pregnant woman should work at her own individual level.

Memorize the low and high numbers of your target zone. If you are above the high number, you need to slow yourself down-by walking, pedaling your bicycle more slowly, or reducing the vigor of your arm and leg movements. Unless you believe you are going to collapse or faint, do not stop moving or sit down. Keep yourself moving until your pulse drops to your target zone and you are ready to resume exercising.

If at any time during exercise you begin feeling faint, dizzy, lightheaded, nauseated, clammy or cold even though you are sweating or extremely fatigued, stop exercising, but walk around for a while and then have a seat. If you are in a structured class, talk with the instructor before leaving-let her know you are feeling unwell. She may want to keep her eye on you for a bit, or she may want to help you seek medical assistance. Also, see your physician before resuming exercise. These are warning signs. Listen to your body. There may be a very simple cause or one that is complicated and serious. Your physician, not your fitness instructor, or you should determine the cause.