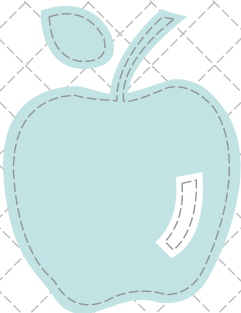
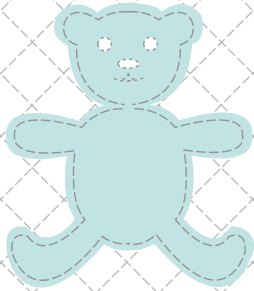


Healthy Activity



A NEW LIFE

Active Living and Pregnancy

Active living means different things to different people, but it offers something for everyone.

Active living means making some kind of physical activity a part of your daily life. It means finding activities that are fun, healthy, and satisfying for you and that suit your schedule and your body.

Active living can help you to

- reduce stress. Healthy activity relaxes your body and mind
- stay comfortable. Staying active can help to prevent backache and constipation
- manage your weight during pregnancy
- keep or improve your level of fitness. You'll be in better shape, which will make labour and delivery easier. You'll find it easier to regain your muscle tone, strength, and figure after your baby is born
- have more energy. Exercise and activity can make you feel alive and energetic

Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends that adults build 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity into their day.

Unless you have medical reasons for not being physically active, you'll help yourself and your baby by being active rather than taking it easy. Making healthy activity, a natural part of your life will help you to feel and look better now and after the baby comes.

This section offers a balanced program to help you to exercise your whole body within your own limits. It includes an exercise program for pregnancy and postpartum, advice on aerobic activity, and information on breathing and relaxation techniques.

If you are already leading an active life, ask your doctor, physiotherapist, fitness instructor, or public health nurse for advice about exercising during pregnancy.

If you haven't been involved in any regular activity program, talk to your doctor, physiotherapist, or fitness instructor before you begin one. Then start slowly and build at your own pace.

Everyday Comfort



As your size and shape change during pregnancy, you may find that ordinary things like standing and sitting seem awkward and uncomfortable.

Finding new ways to adjust your movements to allow for the changes in your body will make these everyday activities safer and more comfortable.

Stand Tall: Posture during Pregnancy

Good posture is the key to comfort during pregnancy. By standing correctly, you can carry the weight of your pregnancy without straining your back or abdominal muscles.

Check Your Posture

Yes!



- Straighten neck.
Tuck in chin.
Body straightens.
- Roll shoulders back.
Lift up rib cage.
Relax arms at sides.
Relax shoulders.
- Tighten abdominal muscles.
Flatten lower back.
Tuck buttocks under.
- Relax knees.
- Balance weight on the centre of each foot.

No!



- Neck sags.
Chin pokes forward.
Body slumps.
- Shoulders slouched.
Rib cage cramped.
Arms turn in.
- Abdominal muscles loose.
Lower back hollowed.
Pelvis tips forward.
- Knees stiff and locked.
- Weight on the inner edges of each foot.

Remember good posture when you walk

Keep your back straight and your head up. Imagine that there is a string attached to the top of your head, pulling upward and straightening your spine.

Hints for comfortable standing

If you must stand for long periods of time, raise one foot on a stool or the rung of a chair. This will ease the strain on your back.

When using equipment like a broom or a vacuum, stand with one foot forward and knees bent. This will make it easier for you to shift your weight and turn.



Day-to-Day Back Care

Taking care of your back can be an everyday activity, now and after your baby comes.

Ironing

When ironing, rest one foot on a small stool. Changing position will ease the strain on your back that comes from standing in one position for any length of time.

Laundry

Avoid bending and twisting when you move clothes from a top-load washer to a front-load dryer. Try placing the clothes on the top of the dryer and then moving them into the dryer.

When you hang clothes on a line, make sure that the laundry basket is at waist level.

Making Beds

Bend your knees, or if this isn't possible, place one knee on the bed.

Carrying Groceries

Balance the load by carrying equal amounts in each hand. Heavy bags should be held close to the body and supported with your arms bent.

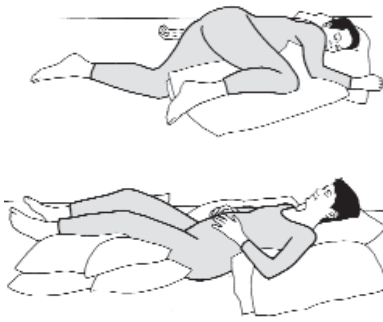
When removing groceries from the trunk of the car, put one foot or knee on the bumper.



Vacuuming

Balance yourself with one foot in front of the other. Keep your knees slightly bent and shift your weight from back foot to front foot. Try to maintain a pelvic tilt to avoid strain.

Get down on your knees to reach under furniture.



Sleeping

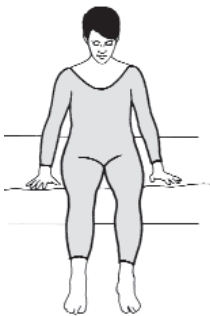
Your mattress should be as firm as possible.

Sleep in a position that reduces strain to your neck and back:

- Side-lying: Bend your knees and put a pillow between your legs.
- Lie on your back with a pillow under your knees. **Do not** use this position later in pregnancy, because the weight of the baby will put pressure on one of your main blood vessels.

Avoid lying on your stomach. This is stressful for both your neck and back.

Getting Up (from the floor or out of bed)



As your baby grows during pregnancy, you may find it harder to change position — for example to get out of bed or to get up after exercising or lying on the floor. Try to move slowly and carefully as you change position. This will help to prevent muscle strain and dizziness.

To get up from the floor:

- Bend your knees.
- Push your feet into the floor.
- Lift your buttocks slightly and roll to one side.
- Use your arms to slowly push up to a sitting position.
- Roll onto your knees.
- Move one knee forward, placing your foot flat on the floor.
- Straighten your back.
- Place your hands on the bent knee for support.
- Stand, using your leg muscles to push yourself up.

To get out of bed:

- Move close to the edge of the bed.
- Bend your knees. Push your feet onto the bed and roll to one side.
- Use your arms to slowly push up to a sitting position.
- Swing your legs over the side of the bed.
- Rest for a moment, breathing normally.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles and stand up slowly.

To lift with ease, bend your knees.

It's a good idea to avoid heavy lifting as much as possible while you're pregnant. Let someone else take out the garbage and carry the groceries.

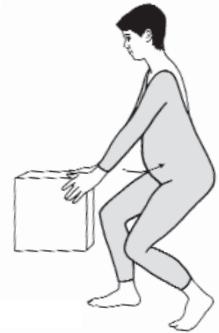
If you have a toddler or small child, it's nearly impossible to avoid lifting. You can make it a lot easier, though. For example, instead of lifting a toddler from the floor, help her to climb up onto a sofa or a stool and lift from there. Or sit on a sofa or chair and let her climb up onto your lap.

Learning how to lift properly can save you a lot of back pain, now and after your baby is born. The key is to lift with your leg muscles, not your back. Never bend from the waist. Bend your knees and lift with your legs. It also helps to bring the load as close to your body as possible before you lift.

Whenever you lift:

- stand with your feet apart
- tuck in your buttocks and tighten your abdomen
- bend your knees
- pull the object close to your body
- lift with your legs

Lifting



Sitting (and getting up again)



Good Sitting Posture

- Sit up straight, with your back and the upper part of your buttocks resting against the back of the chair. Avoid sitting on the edge of the chair and slumping against the back.
- Your feet should be out in front of you, either flat on the floor or supported on a stool. Sitting with your legs crossed blocks blood flow to your legs.
- Use a stool to raise your legs and feet as often as you can while sitting. This is a good time to do foot and ankle exercises to improve your circulation. Try circling your ankles and stretching each foot up and down.
- Use little pillows to support your neck and the small of your back.

To Sit Down

- Tighten your abdomen, pulling up and in. Tuck your buttocks under.
- Use your leg muscles to lower yourself into the chair. Hold the armrests if you need support.
- Slide back into the chair.

To Stand Up

- Slide forward to the front of the chair.
- Remain upright. Don't lean forward.
- Tighten your buttocks and use your legs to raise your body.
- Hold the armrests for balance.

A comfortable chair or rocker makes good sitting posture easier.

- **The seat** should be high enough so that your thighs rest comfortably and your feet are flat on the floor. It should be deep enough to support the length of your thigh, but shallow enough to let your back and the upper part of your buttocks rest against the back of the chair.
- **The back** should be high enough to support your shoulders. It's even better if it can support your head.
- **The armrests** should be the right height to allow your arms to rest comfortably when you are sitting upright.

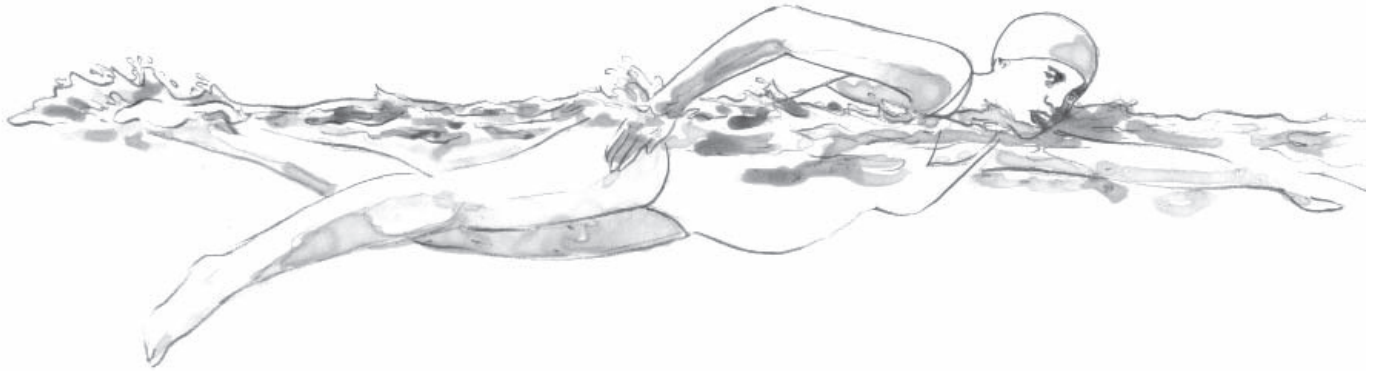
If you can't find the perfect chair, you can make any chair more comfortable by using pillows, footrests, and footstools for support.

Safe and Comfortable Activity

Safety and comfort are important considerations, no matter what kind of exercise or activity you do.

Physical activity is safe and healthy during pregnancy. With a little care, you can continue most of the activities you enjoy.

Have fun! Enjoy a safe and active pregnancy.



Recommended — Safe and Fun

- Walking
- Aquacize
- Swimming
- Biking, especially on a stationary bike
- Cross-country skiing on flat ground
- Snowshoeing
- Low-impact aerobic classes
- Prenatal exercise classes with qualified instructors
- Yoga
- Tai chi

Be Very Careful with These

- Racquet sports
Decrease your activity level.
Stop after your 6th month.
- Golf
Adjust your swing; no quick, jerking twist.
- Bowling
Don't overextend or lose your balance.

*Safe and
Unsafe
Activities
during
Pregnancy*

- **Weight training**
Do not lift while lying on your back.
Use low weights and high repetitions.
Lessen the weight as your pregnancy progresses.
Use weight machines. Avoid free weights.
Don't hold your breath. Always breathe out on lifting.
- **Running (high impact)**
If you are not currently a regular runner, do not start to run or jog during pregnancy.
If you currently run or jog, talk to your doctor about continuing to run during pregnancy. Listen to your body, and your doctor, when you consider running in the last trimester of your pregnancy.
While running
 - Keep your feet wide apart.
 - Keep your feet close to the ground. Don't bounce or run on uneven surfaces.
 If you have any pain, stop and find a new activity.

Avoid These — Not Safe during Pregnancy

- Downhill skiing
- Contact sports — basketball, volleyball, hockey
- Scuba diving
- Horseback riding, especially jumping
- Heavy weightlifting
- Softball or baseball

Staying Comfortable and Active

Dress comfortably, in loose, lightweight clothing.

Dress in layers so you can peel them off as you get warm.

Wear a well-fitted bra with good support and non-elastic straps.

Wear well-cushioned shoes with good heel and arch support.

Go to the bathroom before you begin exercising.

Review the Guidelines for Healthy Activity on page 146.



A Program for an Active Pregnancy

Prenatal activity strengthens, stretches, and relaxes your body. All of these are important for a healthy pregnancy and birth and a quick postpartum recovery.

This prenatal program includes:

- warm-up
- muscle-strengthening and stretching exercises
- cool-down

These exercises are also good to do after your baby is born. They'll help your body to return to its pre-pregnancy state and give you the energy you need to enjoy your new baby.

It's a good idea to do these exercises as often as possible — every day is ideal. So have fun doing them. Find a friend, get the little ones to 'help' you, or do them on your own. You'll start to feel the benefits sooner than you might think.



Ease into exercise

- Start by doing each exercise 3 to 5 times. Gradually build up to 5 to 10 times each.
- Begin and end your program with a few easy stretches.
- Take a few deep breaths and relax between exercises.
- Avoid high-bounce exercises. No-bounce are safest.

Listen to your body

- Drink plenty of water while exercising.
- Don't let yourself become overheated or overtired.
- Take regular rest periods.
- Breathe normally while exercising. Don't hold your breath.
- If you have any pain, stop the exercise and check with your doctor, public health nurse, physiotherapist, or fitness instructor.

*Staying Safe
and Active*

Pace yourself

- Avoid strenuous exercise during the first trimester.
- If you weren't active before you became pregnant, increase your activity level gradually.
- You should be able to carry on a conversation while you are doing any cardiovascular exercise. If you can't talk comfortably, you are exercising too hard.
- Drink plenty of water during cardiovascular exercise. Your uterus is a warm environment, and when your body temperature rises, it does in the uterus as well. Drinking extra water will keep your body, and your uterus, at a comfortable temperature.

CAUTION After cardiovascular exercise, do not lie flat on your back or on your right side until your body has cooled down.

- You may have to change your activity level as your pregnancy progresses.
- From the fourth month on, do your exercises standing, sitting or side lying. Try not to be flat on your back for more than five minutes at a time. The baby's weight can press on your blood vessels and decrease circulation to you and your baby.

Stop exercising and talk with your doctor if

- you have any bleeding from your vagina
- you have persistent contractions after exercising. Some tightening of the uterus is normal after exercise but if the contractions keep coming, let your doctor know
- you have chest pains
- you are extremely short of breath

See page 5, What's Normal, for other warning signs.

Warming up helps your body ease into exercise. Slow stretching before you start exercising will make you more flexible and prepare your muscles for increased activity.

1. Alternate Arm Stretches

Exercises shoulder, arm, and trunk muscles. Lifts your ribs and helps make breathing easier.

- Keep your back straight while sitting or standing.
- Raise both arms over your head.
- With fingers outstretched, reach first one arm, then the other, toward the ceiling.
- Repeat.
- Lower your arms and relax.

2. Elbow Circles

Relaxes shoulder muscles.

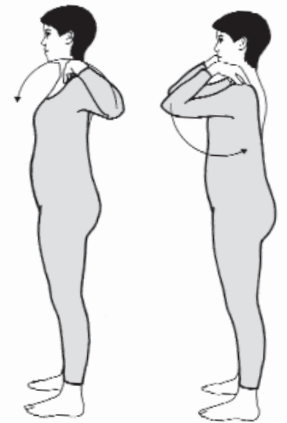
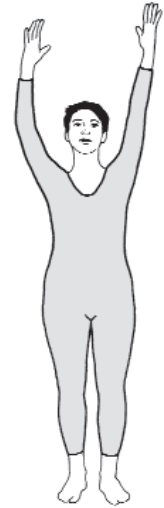
- Stand or sit up straight.
- Bend your elbows and touch your shoulders with your fingers.
- Make a large circle by moving your elbows forward, up and back.
- Repeat 5 times.
- Relax with your arms at your sides.

3. Neck Stretches

Stretches and relaxes neck muscles.

- Stand or sit up straight.
- Bring your ear toward your shoulder.
- Breathe in and out deeply; feel the muscles stretch.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times.
- Relax.

Warm-up

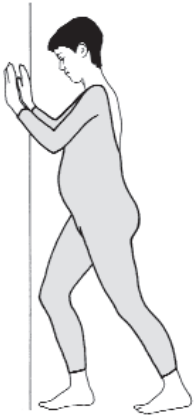




4. Head Turn

Stretches and relaxes neck muscles.

- Stand or sit up straight.
- Turn your head to one side; look over your shoulder.
- Repeat to the other side.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times.
- Relax.



5. Calf and Hip Stretch

Stretches the muscles in the back of the legs and hips.

- Stand in front of a wall, with one foot in front of the other, toes pointing straight ahead, palms flat against the wall.
- Keep your back leg straight and your heels firmly on the floor. Avoid arching your back.
- Bend your front knee gradually and slowly lean toward the wall. As you feel the stretch in your back leg, bend your knee slightly to avoid strain.
- Repeat with your other leg.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times.
- Relax.

You can increase the stretch by widening the distance between your back leg and the wall and by pushing your hips toward the wall.



6. Tailor Sitting

Stretches the inside of your legs.

CAUTION

When tailor sitting, never use your hands or elbows to press your knees toward the floor. This can cause over-stretching and strain in your pubic area.

- Sit on the floor with your back straight and your shoulders level.
- Put the soles of your feet together and pull your heels in toward your body. Let your hands relax.
- Slowly relax both knees toward the floor — go as far as is comfortable. If you feel any pain, stop.
- Hold for the count of 5 to 10.
- Relax, bringing your knees back up to where you started.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times.

7. Leg Stretching

Stretches your leg muscles (hamstrings).

- Sit in a chair. Tighten abdominals. Keep your back straight. Place a small towel roll behind your back.
- Straighten your right leg out. Hold for the count of 5 to 10.
- Relax.
- Repeat with your other leg.



The exercises in this part of the program (#8 to #18) are designed to help your body adjust to pregnancy and strengthen it for childbirth.

When doing these, or any exercises, avoid lying on your back for more than 5 minutes without pillows under your head and shoulders.

Stretching and Strengthening Exercises

REMEMBER

- Start by doing each exercise 3 to 5 times and gradually build up to 5 to 10.
- Breathe normally while exercising. Never hold your breath.
- Do stretches slowly and avoid bouncing.

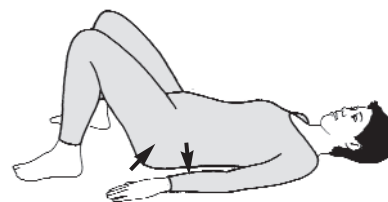
8. Pelvic Tilt

Helps prevent and relieve backache and strengthens abdominal muscles.

- Lie on your back, with knees bent, feet flat on the floor.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles.
- Tighten your buttocks and press the small of your back into the floor.
- Hold for a few seconds, breathing normally.
- Slowly relax.

Pregnancy puts a great strain on your abdominal muscles, and the next three exercises are intended to help strengthen them. Strong abdominal muscles will help you to be more comfortable now and will help you during labour and delivery.

Before you do any abdominal exercises, you need to check for abdominal muscle separation. This is a separation of the central connecting seam of the abdominal muscles. It may be very slight or very noticeable and it happens to about one of every three pregnant women. Ask a friend, your partner, doctor, or prenatal educator to help you check.



Here's how to check:

- Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor.
- Tuck in your chin and slowly raise your head and shoulders until you can see your abdomen.
- If you have a separation, you will usually see a bulge just above or below your belly button. If you're not sure, feel the centre of your abdomen. If you can feel a soft area between two bands of firmer muscle, then you have a separation.



Here's what to do if you have a separation:

If you have a separation, you'll need to support your abdomen while doing exercises. You can do this by either lacing your fingers together across your abdomen, or crossing your arms and putting a hand on either side of your abdomen.



There are mixed opinions on when to stop abdominal exercises if muscle separation occurs. You can always continue with the pelvic tilt and pelvic floor (Kegel) exercises to maintain some abdominal muscle control.

For exercises #9 and #10, later in pregnancy, you may want to prop pillows under your upper back, so you are lying on a slant. This will allow you to continue with your abdominal exercises and place less strain on your trunk.

9. Curl-ups

Strengthens the abdominal muscles. If you have a separation, remember to support your abdomen with your hands.

- Lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor, arms across your abdomen.
- Tighten your abdomen and buttocks. (This is the pelvic tilt. Hold these muscles firm while doing this exercise.)
- Tuck in your chin.
- Lift up your head and shoulders while breathing out.
- Slowly lower your shoulders and head to the floor.
- Relax.
- Repeat.

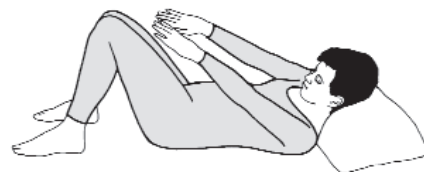


10. Diagonal Curl-ups

Strengthens your diagonal abdominal muscles.

NOTE Avoid this exercise if you have a separation.

- Lie down, knees bent, feet flat on the floor.
- Tighten your abdomen and buttocks. (This is the pelvic tilt. Hold these muscles firm while doing this exercise.)
- Tuck in your chin.
- Lift your head and shoulders.
- Reach your arms across your body toward one knee.
- Curl up as far as is comfortable, breathing out. Hold for the count of 5, breathing normally.
- Slowly lower your shoulders and head to the floor.
- Relax.
- Repeat, going from side to side.



The next two exercises (#11 and #12) are designed to help you strengthen and control your pelvic floor muscles. Your pelvic floor is made up of the layer of muscles that are attached to your pubic bone in the front and your tail bone in the back.

During pregnancy you need strong pelvic floor muscles to support your uterus. During childbirth you need to be able to control these muscles, so you can relax them during the birth of your baby.

Regular exercise will keep your pelvic floor muscles strong and elastic. Pelvic floor exercises are sometimes called hidden exercises or Kegel exercises. You can do these exercises any time — when you brush your teeth, while watching TV or standing in line at the grocery store. In fact, you can do these exercises any time, anywhere, in any position — sitting, lying, or standing.

Doing 5 contractions, 10 times a day isn't hard, and you'll reap the benefits now and for the rest of your life.

11. Basic Pelvic Floor Exercise.

- Any position: lying, sitting, standing, on all fours.
- Tighten the muscles around your bladder, vaginal and rectal openings. Feel them pulling up inside.
- *Hold for a count of five.*
- Relax and repeat.



12. The Elevator

- Sitting, standing, lying. Any position is OK, but lying down is easiest when you are learning this one.
- Imagine that you are an elevator.
- Slowly contract your pelvic floor muscles, pulling them tighter and tighter at each floor.
 - First floor, contract.
 - Second floor, a bit tighter.
 - Third floor, tighter.
 - Fourth floor, *hold for a few seconds*.
- Breathe normally.
- Now, come back down the elevator.
 - Third floor, release a bit.
 - Second floor, release a bit more.
 - First floor, relax.
- Repeat.

13. Pelvic Rock

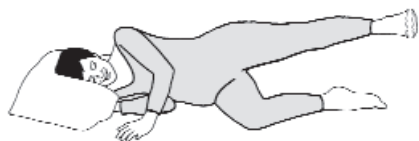
This exercise can help to relieve lower back pain.



- Kneel on all fours.
- Hold your back flat (not arched or hollowed). Keep your head level with your back.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles, pulling in and upward.
- Tuck in your buttocks.
- Slowly relax your abdomen and buttocks. Keep your back flat. Don't let it sag.
- Repeat slowly.

14. Side-Lying Leg Lifts

Helps strengthen all upper leg and hip muscles and helps keep up the circulation in your legs.



- Lie on the floor on your side. Support your head with your arm on a pillow.
- Bend your bottom knee and hips forward for support.
- Keep your upper leg in a straight line with your body.
- Steady yourself by placing your upper hand in front of your body.
- Tighten your abdomen and buttocks. (This is the pelvic tilt. Hold these muscles firm while doing this exercise.)
- Keeping your knee straight and your foot bent, raise and lower your upper leg a few times.
- Lower leg and relax.
- Roll on to your other side and repeat with your other leg.

15. Ankle Circles

Helps with blood circulation to the legs and helps reduce ankle swelling. If your ankles continue to swell, lie down and raise your ankles above your hips during the exercise.

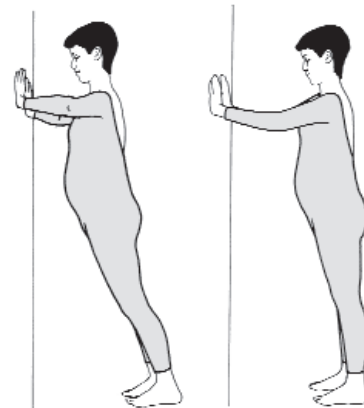
- This exercise can be done lying or sitting.
- Straighten one leg.
- Make slow, complete circles with your foot, going one way first, then the other. Repeat several times.
- Repeat with your other foot.



16. Push-Offs

Helps to strengthen the upper back.

- Stand facing a wall.
- Keep your body straight from shoulders to feet.
- Keep your heels flat on the floor.
- Push off from the wall by bending and straightening your arms.



17. Imaginary Chair

Strengthens upper leg muscles.

CAUTION Avoid this exercise if you have knee problems.

- Stand with your back against a wall and your arms relaxed at your sides.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles and tuck in your buttocks. (This maintains a good pelvic tilt.)
- Bend your knees and slide down the wall.
- Stop at a comfortable 'sitting' position.
- Slowly slide back up to a standing position.
- Repeat.



18. Squatting

Strengthens the thigh muscles.

CAUTION Avoid this exercise if you have knee problems.

- Keep your feet flat on the floor and wide apart.
- Squat to a comfortable position. If you can, rest your elbows on your knees.
- Maintain a pelvic tilt by flattening the curve of your lower back and keeping your spine as straight as possible.
- Hold for a count of five.
- Push up slowly, using your leg muscles and keeping your back straight.



Cool-Down

Just as a warm-up eases your body into exercise, a cool-down eases you out. For your cool-down, repeat the warm-up exercises. They're just listed here, but you'll find complete directions in the Warm-Up section.

19. Alternate Arm Stretches

20. Elbow Circles

21. Neck Stretches

22. Head Turn

23. Calf and Hip Stretch

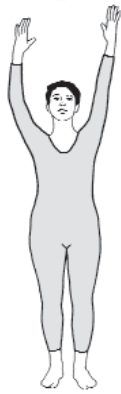
24. Tailor Sitting

25. Leg Stretching

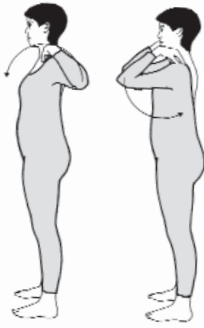
Once you've learned how to do the prenatal exercises use the chart on the next page to help you remember their order. Begin doing each exercise 3 to 5 times. Slowly work up to 5 to 10 times each.

Prenatal Activity Chart

Warm-Up



1 Alternate Arm Stretches



2 Elbow Circles



3 Neck Stretches



4 Head Turn



5 Calf and Hip Stretch

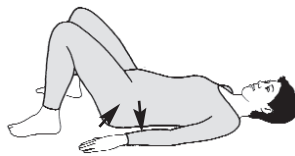


6 Tailor Sitting

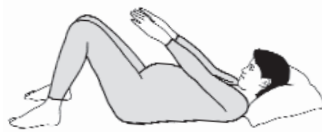


7 Leg Stretching

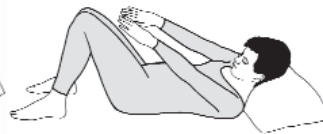
Stretching and Strengthening Exercises



8 Pelvic Tilt



9 Curl-ups



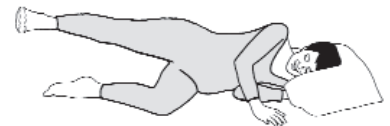
10 Diagonal Curl-ups



11 Basic Pelvic Floor Exercise



12 The Elevator

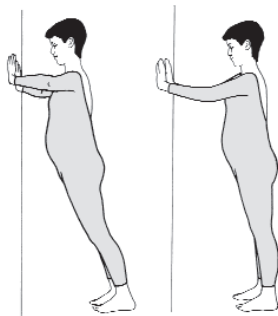


13 Pelvic Rock

14 Side-Lying Leg Lifts



15 Ankle Circles



16 Push-Offs



17 Imaginary Chair



18 Squatting

Cool-Down

Go back and repeat your warm-up. (#1 to #7)

Exercises to Avoid

Most exercises are safe during pregnancy, but there are a few you should avoid. These put unnecessary strain on your back or abdomen or may throw you off balance.

To be safe, avoid:

- trunk rotations with straight legs in a standing position
- double straight-leg raises while lying on your back
- straight leg sit-ups
- exercises that exaggerate the hollow of the back
- shoulder stand with bicycling
- deep knee bends — up and down
- touching your toes from a standing position without bending your knees

If you have any doubts about the safety of an exercise, check with your doctor, physiotherapist, public health nurse or fitness instructor.

Active Living

Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends that adults build 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity into their day.

In addition to a daily strengthening and stretching routine, activities like walking, cycling and swimming are part of an active life.

If you're already active, try to stay active during your pregnancy. Be sure to read the Safe and Comfortable Activity section for recommendations on safe and unsafe activities during pregnancy.

If you haven't been physically active before, you can begin during your pregnancy with activities like walking, swimming and special prenatal exercise classes. You'll find a sample walking program on page 147.

Moderation is the key to healthy activity. Listen to your body. If you have any pain, tiredness or shortness of breath, try slowing down or changing to a different activity.

Find an activity you enjoy and have fun!

Guidelines for Healthy Activity

Follow the guidelines for staying comfortable and active on page 132.

Choose an activity you enjoy and try to do it for 10 to 15 minutes at a time, 3 or 4 times a week.

Warm up before your activity.

Use the exercises in the Warm-up section of this booklet.

Begin slowly.

Cool down after your activity.

Gradually slow down. Don't stop suddenly.

See the Cool-down section on page 142.

Use the "talk test."

If you are moving at the right pace, you should be able to chat comfortably during your activity. If you can't carry on a conversation, you are exercising too hard. Slow down!

Don't forget to eat and drink.

Have a small snack, like whole wheat bread, about 1 to 1 1/2 hours before you start. This will give you energy and avoid using up food your baby needs.

If the weather or the room is hot, drink small amounts of water every 15 minutes while you're active.

Avoid activities that involve

- jumping
- twisting
- rapid jerking
- sprinting
- quick starts



Walking is one of the best and easiest activities you can do during pregnancy. It's safe and natural, and there is almost no risk of injury.

Walking

Brisk walking is a healthy activity. More than half of your body's muscles are designed for walking. It trains your heart, lungs, and muscles to work more efficiently.

Regular, brisk walking can reduce blood pressure, improve digestion, and help prevent constipation. It also helps your body use more calories. When combined with healthy eating, walking will help you to maintain a healthy weight and a positive body image.

Walking has other advantages as well.

- Walking refreshes the mind, reduces tiredness, and increases energy.
- Walking relieves stress and tension.

And finally, whether you do it alone or with friends or family, walking is fun!

Level 1: Just Starting

Week	How Long?	How Often?	How Far?
1	10 min.	2 days/wk	1 km or 1/2 mile
2	10 min.	3 days/wk	1 km or 1/2 mile
3	15 min.	3 days/wk	1.2 km or 3/4 mile
4	18 min.	3 days/wk	1.4 km or 3/4 mile
5	20 min.	3 or 4 days/wk	1.6 km or 1 mile
6	20 min.	4 days/wk	1.6 km or 1 mile
7	25 min.	4 days/wk	2 km or 1 1/4 miles
8	30 min.	4 days/wk	2.4 km or 1 1/2 miles
9	32 min.	4 days/wk	2.8 km or 1 3/4 miles
10	35 min.	4 days/wk	3.2 km or 2 miles

Level 2: For Active People

Week	How Long?	How Often?	How Far?
1	20 min.	3 days/wk	1.6 km or 1 mile
2	22 min.	3 days/wk	2 km or 1 1/4 miles
3	25 min.	3 days/wk	2.4 km or 1 1/2 miles
4	30 min.	3 days/wk	3.2 km or 2 miles
5	30 min.	4 days/wk	3.2 km or 2 miles

Relaxation

Relaxation is a way of letting go. When you relax, you let go of the tension in your muscles and in your mind.

Relaxation:

- helps you to save energy
- gives you a feeling of well-being
- helps make your delivery easier

Learning to relax is one of the best ways to help yourself to be more comfortable during labour.

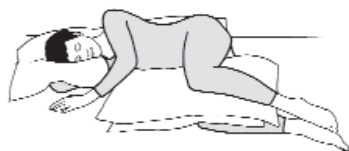
The routine in this section is one way to practise relaxation. It's not the only way. Everyone is different. If you've found something that helps you to relax, use it.

When you practise relaxation:

- make sure all parts of your body are supported and comfortable
- let go of all muscle tension
- clear your mind
- breathe slowly and evenly

Relaxation is a life skill. Learn it now and you will find ways to use it during pregnancy, birth, and for the rest of your life.

Finding Comfortable Positions



You never know what will feel good during labour, so it's a good idea to practise relaxing in many different positions.

There is only one position to avoid while relaxing: you should not lie flat on your back. This is because the weight of your uterus presses on your blood vessels and can reduce the blood flow to you and your baby.

Many women find these positions comfortable:

Side lying, with a pillow under your head and another between your knees. Both knees should be slightly bent. Lying on your left side helps improve the circulation to you and your baby.

Side lying with one arm behind. One pillow supports your head and shoulders, another supports your upper leg. Lying on your left side helps improve your circulation.

Back lying, with at least two pillows under your head and shoulders and another under your knees. **Do not** use this position later in pregnancy, because the weight of the baby will put pressure on one of your main blood vessels.

When You Practise Relaxation

It can be helpful to have your labour partner check your muscles for tension while you're learning relaxation. They do this by gently touching or lifting parts of your body — for example an arm or leg. If it's limp and relaxed, your partner puts it gently back on the pillow. If it's tense, your partner strokes or touches it gently until it relaxes. A warm, soft touch can be very relaxing, and many people find it easier to release their muscles and 'let go' in response to a touch.

Breathe slowly and deeply while doing this or any relaxation exercise.

As you tighten your muscles, don't clench them too tightly; just enough so that you can feel them.

As you relax, think about letting go or releasing the tension in your muscles.

You may find it helpful to have your labour partner give you relaxation cues in a calm, soothing voice. This will help you to learn the routine and will get you used to feeling relaxed when you hear your labour partner's voice. This will be very reassuring when you are trying to relax during labour. Having your partner read "Relaxing Step by Step" to you while you practise relaxing is a good way to learn this.

The purpose of this routine is to help you learn to recognize and release muscle tension. You do this by tightening and releasing your muscles, one by one. Tighten as you breathe in. Relax as you breathe out.

You may wish to start at your toes and work up to your face, or start with your face and work down to your toes. Try it both ways to see which is more relaxing for you.

Find a comfortable position, making sure all parts of your body are supported and comfortable.

- Breathe in, tightening your ankles and pulling your feet back toward your body.
Breathe out, letting go.
- Breathe in, tightening your legs.
Breathe out, letting go.
- Breathe in, tightening your buttocks and pelvic floor muscles.
Breathe out, letting go.
- Breathe in, curling your hands into a fist or straightening your fingers.
Breathe out, letting go.
- Breathe in, bending your wrist.
Breathe out, letting go.

Relaxing Step by Step

- Breathe in, pulling your shoulder blades together.
Breathe out, letting go.
- Breathe in, making a face.
Breathe out, letting go.
- Continue breathing slowly and evenly ... in and out, in and out,
in and out ...
- Let your whole body go ... close your eyes ... rest. Breathe in and out,
in and out.
- As you sink deeper into relaxation, your body will feel heavy, as if it is
sinking into the floor. Let it go. Breathe in and out, in and out.
- Continue breathing: in and out, in and out, in and out. Let the rhythm
of your breathing keep your mind clear and calm.
- You may drift off into sleep. Let yourself go. Breathe in and out, in and
out, in and out.
- When you're ready to move, change position slowly and gradually.
Clench and stretch your hands. Make circles with your feet and ankles.
Move your legs. Sit up slowly. Rest for a moment, then stand up.



After the Baby Comes: A Postnatal Program

Postnatal exercises are as important as prenatal. They help your body adjust after the changes of pregnancy and return to its pre-pregnant state. Postnatal exercises can:

- improve your circulation
- speed up healing
- restore muscle strength
- build up your energy
- help your bowels and bladder return to normal
- help you feel better and more relaxed

You can start doing postnatal exercises as soon as your baby is born. Check the Healthy Birthing section for postnatal exercises you can do while still in hospital.

Once you return home, you can start doing your prenatal routine once again. Start slowly and regain your strength gradually.

Healthy activity is also still important. Return slowly. Start with walking or swimming. Make sure that your stitches are well healed and all bleeding has stopped. Remember that moderation is the key. Listen to your body. If you have any pain or increased bleeding, stop and call your doctor for advice.

Check with your doctor before you return to a favourite sport or activity. Within 8 weeks you should be able to participate fully in all your favourite activities.

Postnatal Program

In the first week home:

Warm-up

Do the parts of the prenatal Warm-up that you find comfortable.

Strengthening Exercises

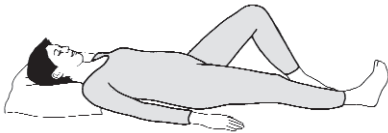
- Pelvic Tilts
- Pelvic Floor Exercises
- Curl-ups*
- Diagonal Curl-ups*

Cool-down

Repeat the Warm-up

Relaxation

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Relax your arms at your sides.
- Straighten one leg, pressing your knee into the floor and pointing toes toward your head.
- Press your lower back into the floor.
- Pull your shoulder blades together.
- Tuck your chin in and push your head into the floor.
- Stretch your arms down.
- Hold for the count of 10.
- Relax slowly and completely. Breathe slowly and deeply.
- Repeat, straightening your other leg.



In your second week home add the rest of the stretching and strengthening exercises from your prenatal routine.

* If you had a cesarean birth, read the following section before doing these exercises.

After a Cesarean Birth

After a cesarean birth, you can — and should — begin postnatal exercises while still in hospital. The Healthy Birthing section has information about breathing and other exercises to get you off to a healthy start.

When you return home, you can follow the same postnatal program as other mothers, with only one change: omit the abdominal exercises (Curl-ups, and Diagonal Curl-ups) until 3 to 6 weeks post partum.

Practising good body mechanics can help prevent injury to your back. Keep on practising good posture and being careful when lifting.

Remember: to lift with ease, bend your knees.

When you pick up your baby or toddler, follow the advice on safe lifting in the Everyday Comfort section. Don't carry a baby or toddler on your hip.

You can also protect your back by making baby care as comfortable and convenient as possible.

Adjust your baby's crib mattress to the highest level possible. Lower the side rail when you pick up the baby or change the bed clothes.

Use a waist-high table when changing or bathing your baby. If this isn't possible, kneel down to bathe or change the baby.

Adjust stroller handles to waist level. Stand up straight and use your arms to push.

Be sure you have good support when you breast- or bottle-feed.

Sitting

- Support your lower back with a pillow
- Support your arms with pillows or chair arms.
- Raise your feet on a small stool.

Breastfeeding in a Side-lying Position

- Place a pillow between your legs and at your lower back.
- Avoid any twisting of the back.

When you use a snuggler, carry the baby above your waist.

When you put an infant carrier into the car — or take it out — protect your back by resting one knee on the seat or placing one foot on the floor of the car. Turn to face the car seat when you buckle up baby.

*Care of Your
Back
while taking care
of your baby*



A Last Word

Making healthy activity a part of your life is worth the effort. When you feel fit and healthy, you feel as though you can handle almost anything. The everyday discomforts and stresses of life seem easier.

Health activity is an important part of a healthy pregnancy. With a little care, you can be active and healthy for pregnancy and for life.



Public Health Services

www.gov.ns.ca/hpp

