



YOUR GUIDE TO

Exercise During Pregnancy



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Welcome

Hey Mumma, congratulations on your little miracle!

Pregnancy can feel overwhelming, especially when it comes to knowing what's safe and what's not. But here's the good news—staying active is one of the best things you can do for both yourself and your baby! In fact, unless you have specific medical complications and have been advised otherwise by your healthcare provider, exercise (especially strength training) is not only safe but highly recommended throughout all trimesters.

This guide will walk you through everything you need to know about exercising safely during pregnancy, so you can feel strong, confident, and empowered on this beautiful journey. Let's get moving!

Benefits for You & Baby!

Backed by multiple studies, staying active during pregnancy offers incredible benefits for both you and your baby. Here's why it's worth prioritising movement:

For a Healthier Pregnancy & Baby:

- ✓ Reduces the risk of preeclampsia and gestational diabetes
- ✓ Lowers the chance of Fetal Macrosomia (excessive birth weight)
- ✓ Supports healthy pregnancy weight gain

For an Easier Labour & Recovery:

- ✓ Prepares your body for birth
- ✓ Increases the chances of an easier labour with fewer complications
- ✓ Helps you recover faster post-birth

For Your Strength & Well-being:

- ✓ Reduces common pregnancy aches, pains, and swelling
- ✓ Boosts energy levels and combats fatigue
- ✓ Improves fitness and strength for a smoother pregnancy

For Your Mental & Emotional Health:

- ✓ Enhances mood and reduces stress
- ✓ Promotes better sleep

Staying active is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your baby—let's keep moving!



There's a lot of misinformation out there when it comes to exercising during pregnancy. Unfortunately, even some healthcare professionals, including GPs and personal trainers, may not have up-to-date knowledge on prenatal fitness. Let's set the record straight! Here are some common myths you might have heard:

✗ "You shouldn't lift more than 5-15 lbs."

✓ Truth: Strength training is safe and beneficial when done correctly, even with heavier weights.

✗ "Exercise is an unnecessary, added stress to pregnancy."

✓ Truth: Staying active actually reduces stress, improves energy, and supports a healthier pregnancy.

✗ "Vigorous exercise increases the risk of miscarriage."

✓ Truth: There is no evidence linking safe, vigorous activity to miscarriage in a healthy pregnancy.

✗ "If you haven't lifted weights before pregnancy, you shouldn't start now."

✓ Truth: While you should ease into it, starting strength training during pregnancy is completely safe and beneficial.

✗ "You shouldn't train your core during pregnancy."

✓ Truth: Core training (when done correctly) supports your posture, reduces back pain, and prepares your body for birth.

The Bottom Line?

For all uncomplicated, healthy pregnancies, exercise is not only safe—it's one of the best things you can do for yourself and your baby!



*Prenatal
Exercise Myths
Debunked!*



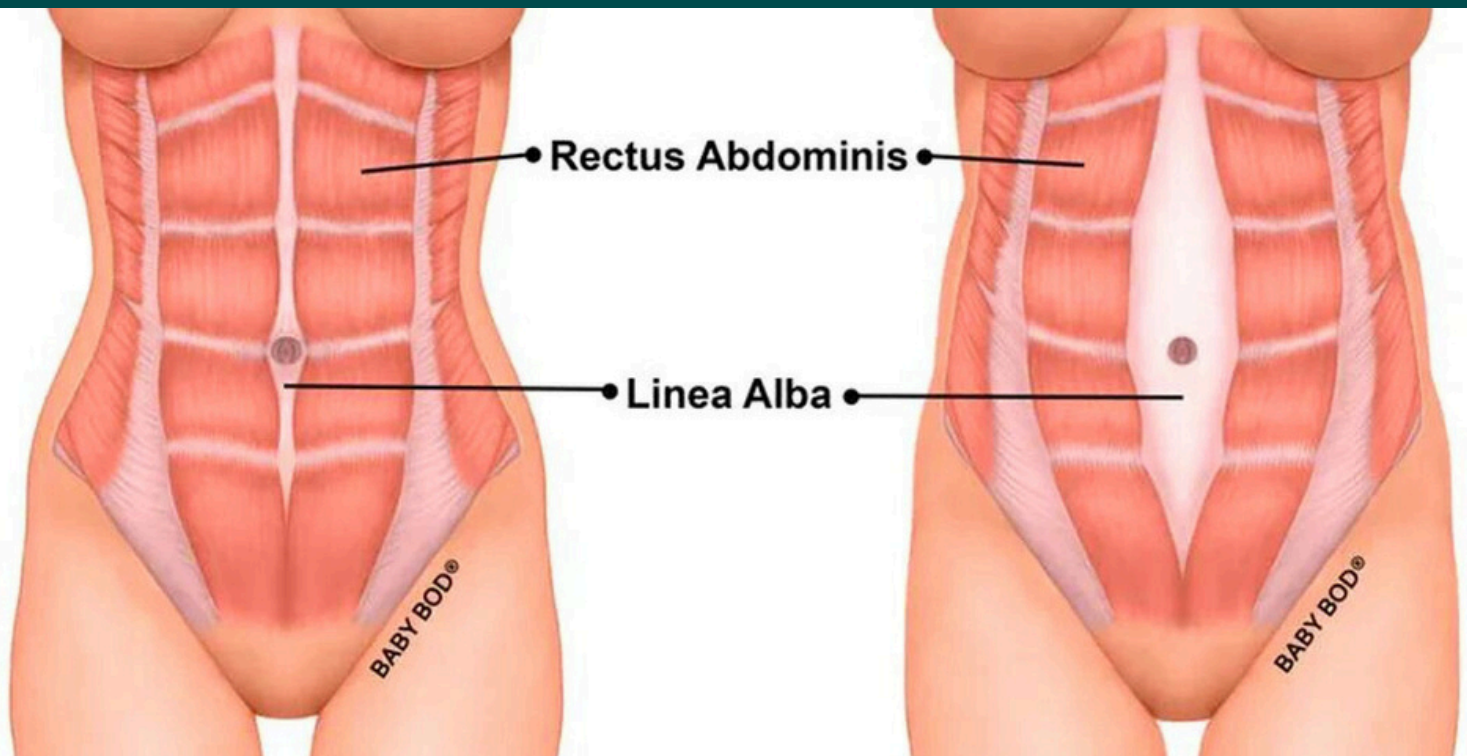
Exercises & Movements to Avoid During Pregnancy

While exercise is incredibly beneficial during pregnancy, there are certain movements and conditions to be mindful of to keep both you and your baby safe. Here's what to avoid:

- **Overheating** – Always exercise in a cool, well-ventilated environment and listen to your body. Overheating can lead to dizziness, nausea, and discomfort.
- **Dehydration** – Stay hydrated by sipping water throughout your workouts to support circulation and prevent fatigue.
- **Reaching Your Max Heart Rate** – While there's no evidence that a high heart rate from exercise is dangerous, pushing to your absolute max is not recommended. Instead, focus on maintaining a moderate intensity where you can still hold a conversation.
- **Supine Positions After 28 Weeks** – Lying flat on your back during exercise after 28 weeks can compress the inferior vena cava, reducing venous return and cardiac output, which may lower uterine blood flow. While short, brief exposures are generally well tolerated in healthy pregnancies, avoiding prolonged supine exercise is recommended. Modify with incline, side-lying, or upright positions to support optimal maternal and fetal circulation.
- **Movements That Trigger Pelvic Floor Dysfunction** – If you experience symptoms like incontinence or a feeling of heaviness in the vagina (common with high-impact exercises like jumping), modify or swap these movements for pelvic-floor-friendly alternatives.
- **Exercises with Rapid Position Changes** – Sudden movements, such as quickly standing up or changing positions too fast, can cause dizziness due to natural blood pressure fluctuations, especially in the first and second trimesters. Take your time transitioning between movements to avoid feeling lightheaded.
- **Barbell Hip Thrusts** – Placing heavy loads directly on the pelvic region poses an unnecessary risk. Fortunately, there are plenty of effective glute-strengthening alternatives that are safer during pregnancy.

Listen to Your Body!

Every pregnancy is unique, so always tune in to how you're feeling and adjust as needed. If something feels off or uncomfortable, modify or skip it. When in doubt, consult a qualified prenatal fitness specialist or your healthcare provider.



Diastasis Recti

What You Need To Know

Diastasis Recti, or ab separation, occurs when the left and right sides of the abdominal wall separate to make room for your growing baby. These muscles are connected by the Linea Alba, a band of connective tissue that naturally stretches during pregnancy. Diastasis Recti happens in 100% of pregnant women who carry to term—it's completely normal! The severity of the separation however, varies woman to woman.

What Affects the Severity of Diastasis Recti?

While some degree of separation is inevitable, factors like baby size, genetics, multiple pregnancies, maternal age, and weight can influence how severe it becomes. The good news? While it can't be entirely prevented, research suggests that exercise—especially proper core training—can help reduce the severity and support post-birth recovery.

Understanding Coning & Intra-Abdominal Pressure

Too much intra-abdominal pressure on the stretched, thinning Linea Alba can lead to coning—a visible bulging along the midline of your abdomen during certain movements.

🔴 Occasional, short-term coning isn't dangerous, but excessive pressure can further weaken the Linea Alba, making postpartum recovery harder and reducing core strength.

How to Minimize Coning:

- ✅ Adjust Your Load – Reduce the weight or resistance used in exercises.
- ✅ Improve Your Breathing – Exhale during the hardest part of the movement (e.g., rising from a squat or pulling down in a Lat Pulldown). *More on this ahead..*
- ✅ Modify Movements – If coning persists despite adjustments, swap the exercise for a safer alternative.



Key takeaway: Diastasis Recti is a natural part of pregnancy, but proper exercise and breathing techniques can help manage its severity and improve recovery postpartum. Listen to your body, and don't hesitate to modify movements when needed!



What is the Pelvic Floor?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles and connective tissue that sits within the pelvis, forming a hammock-like structure that supports your pelvic organs. It plays a crucial role in bladder and bowel control, organ support, core stability, and intra-abdominal pressure regulation.

Your Pelvic Floor

Functions of the Pelvic Floor

1. Supports Bladder & Bowel Control

The pelvic floor muscles help constrict the urethra, vagina, and anal canal, working alongside internal sphincter muscles to prevent leaks until you're ready to go.

2. Provides Support for Pelvic Organs

The pelvic floor holds up key internal organs like the bladder, uterus, and intestines. If the muscles weaken or sustain damage, it may lead to pelvic organ prolapse, where organs shift downward due to a lack of support.

3. Stabilizes the Core & Spine

Your pelvic floor plays a key role in core stability by working with your deep abdominal muscles. It automatically adjusts its activity depending on movement—engaging more when you cough, sneeze, or lift something heavy to help regulate pressure inside the abdomen.

4. Regulates Intra-Abdominal Pressure

Your pelvic floor moves in sync with your diaphragm and core muscles during breathing:

- ✓ Exhaling lifts the pelvic floor, relieving downward pressure.
- ✓ Inhaling increases intra-abdominal pressure, causing the pelvic floor to lower slightly.

Proper breathing techniques, including rib and belly expansion during inhalation, helps distribute this pressure evenly. If abdominal muscles stay constantly "held in" (a common habit), excess pressure is forced downward onto the pelvic floor, increasing the risk of dysfunction.

Intra-Abdominal Pressure & Your Pelvic Floor

During pregnancy, the pelvic floor naturally experiences more strain due to the weight of the baby, placenta, and fluid. Poor management of intra-abdominal pressure can push these muscles beyond their capacity, leading to:

- Incontinence (leaking urine or stool)
- Lower back or pelvic pain
- Pelvic organ prolapse
- Hernias

Additionally, exercise places extra demand on the pelvic floor—especially high-impact movements like jumping, running, or lifting heavy weights. If intra-abdominal pressure isn't properly managed, it can lead to pelvic floor dysfunction.

The Takeaway

Your pelvic floor is always working behind the scenes! By improving breathing techniques, core activation, and exercise choices, you can help keep these muscles strong and functional throughout pregnancy and beyond.





Exercising with Pelvic Floor Health in Mind

Supporting your pelvic floor during exercise is essential for preventing dysfunction, managing intra-abdominal pressure, and keeping your body strong throughout pregnancy.

Key Considerations for Lifting Weights

- Exhale on the effort - Breathe out during the concentric phase (the hardest part) of the movement. This helps engage and lift the pelvic floor, reducing downward pressure.

- Breathe fully & intentionally - Allow your belly to expand and ribs to widen during an inhale. Then, gently draw the pelvic floor up and in as you exhale. Avoid holding tension in your pelvic floor all the time, as this can lead to fatigue.

- Modify as needed - Pay attention to how lifting feels. If you experience heaviness, leaking, or coning, consider reducing the weight or adjusting your technique.

High-Impact Exercise & the Pelvic Floor

Activities like running and jumping create ground reaction forces—which means your body absorbs impact forces of 3 to 12 times your body weight depending on the activity! This increases intra-abdominal pressure and puts extra load on the pelvic floor. As your belly grows, high-impact exercises may naturally feel uncomfortable. While there's no universal rule for when to stop, consider modifying or avoiding high-impact movements once your belly feels noticeably heavy or if you experience any symptoms of pelvic floor strain.

Pelvic Floor Training for Strength & Function

Strengthening the pelvic floor can help reduce the risk of incontinence and improve overall core stability before and after birth.

Pelvic Floor Muscle Composition:

- 30% Fast-Twitch Fibers – React quickly and prevent leaks when intra-abdominal pressure suddenly increases (e.g., sneezing, coughing). These fatigue faster but are strengthened through quick, intense contractions.
- 70% Slow-Twitch Fibers – Provide long-term support and contribute to pelvic floor tone. These are strengthened through longer, sustained contractions.



Your pelvic floor doesn't work in isolation—it's part of your core system and responds to movement, breathing, and load. Training it strategically and consistently can help support you through pregnancy, birth, and postpartum recovery.



How to Activate Your Pelvic Floor

The best way to "squeeze" your pelvic floor is to engage as if you were gripping onto a tampon or stopping the flow of urine.

💡 Training Tips:

- ✓ Practice in different positions – Sitting, standing, and even under light resistance to prepare your pelvic floor for daily activities.
- ✓ Combine slow & fast contractions – Hold contractions for longer durations to strengthen slow-twitch fibers and perform quick pulses to target fast-twitch fibers.
- ✓ Incorporate into workouts – Engage your pelvic floor during functional movements like squats and lunges for real-world strength.



Pelvic Floor Workout Routine

This routine is designed to strengthen and support your pelvic floor during pregnancy by training both fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscle fibers.

Step 1: Find Your Pelvic Floor Activation

Before jumping into exercises, practice engaging your pelvic floor:

- Imagine gripping onto a tampon or stopping the flow of urine.
- Breathe naturally—avoid holding your breath.
- Avoid squeezing your glutes or inner thighs. The contraction should be internal.

💡 Tip: If you're unsure, place a hand on your lower abdomen—your belly should stay relaxed while your pelvic floor engages.

Pelvic Floor Strengthening Routine

Slow Holds (Slow-Twitch Training)

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Take a deep inhale, relax your pelvic floor.
- As you exhale, gently lift and squeeze your pelvic floor muscles.
- Hold for 5–10 seconds, then fully relax.
- Repeat 8–10 times.

Why? Strengthens endurance fibers for bladder control and organ support.

Quick Flicks (Fast-Twitch Training)

- Take a deep inhale and relax your pelvic floor.
- On the exhale, quickly squeeze and release your pelvic floor muscles.
- Do 10-15 quick contractions in a row.
- Rest for a few seconds and repeat 2-3 rounds.

Why? Prepares the pelvic floor for sudden pressure changes (e.g., sneezing, coughing, jumping).

Functional Pelvic Floor Engagement (Squat to Kegel)

- Stand with feet hip-width apart.
- Inhale as you lower into a squat, fully relaxing your pelvic floor.
- Exhale as you stand up, lifting your pelvic floor as you rise.
- Repeat 10-12 reps.

Why? Strengthens the pelvic floor in movement, improving real-life function.

Diaphragmatic Breathing for Pelvic Floor Relaxation

- Lie on your back with knees bent or sit upright.
- Inhale deeply, allowing your belly and ribs to expand.
- Exhale slowly, letting your pelvic floor relax completely.
- Repeat for 1-2 minutes.

Why? Helps prevent pelvic floor overactivity and improves pressure management.

How Often?

- ✓ Daily if you're experiencing pelvic floor symptoms.
- ✓ 3-4 times per week for general maintenance and strength.
- ✓ Always listen to your body and adjust as needed.

💡 Final Tip:

If you experience heaviness, leaking, or pain, modify or reduce intensity. Strong pelvic floor muscles are great, but balance is key—relaxation is just as important as contraction!



But it's not just about Kegels....

Pelvic Floor Lengthening & Relaxation

While strengthening the pelvic floor is important, the ability to fully relax and lengthen the pelvic floor is just as critical—especially for labour and birth. During vaginal birth, the pelvic floor must lengthen significantly to allow the baby to descend and be born. A pelvic floor that is strong but unable to relax can contribute to:

- Increased perineal tension
- Prolonged pushing phase
- Higher risk of tearing or assisted delivery
- Pelvic floor dysfunction symptoms

For this reason, prenatal pelvic floor training should focus on both strength and relaxation.

Why Pelvic Floor Relaxation Matters for Birth & Pelvic Floor Health

A healthy pelvic floor needs to:

- Contract to support the growing baby during pregnancy
- Relax and lengthen to allow effective pushing during labour
- Relax and lengthen in sync with your diaphragm for optimal pressure management, labour efficiency, and overall core and pelvic stability
- Recoil and recover postpartum

Learning how to consciously relax the pelvic floor before birth can:

- Improve coordination during pushing
- Reduce unnecessary tension in the pelvic tissues
- Improve pressure management during contractions
- Support smoother postpartum recovery

Understanding Pelvic Floor Lengthening

When you inhale deeply, the diaphragm moves downward. The pelvic floor should respond by gently lengthening and descending.

When you exhale, the pelvic floor naturally recoils upward.

Training this natural rhythm improves pelvic floor awareness, control, and adaptability—all essential for labour and reducing risk of pelvic floor dysfunction.

Pelvic Floor Relaxation & Lengthening Exercises

Diaphragmatic Breathing with Pelvic Floor Descent

- Sit upright, lie on your side, or on your back with support
- Place one hand on your ribs or belly
- Inhale slowly through your nose, allowing your ribs and belly to expand
- As you inhale, imagine your pelvic floor softening and gently widening
- Exhale slowly and allow the pelvic floor to return naturally
- Repeat for 1-2 minutes

Why?

Encourages relaxation, reduces overactivity, and reinforces the natural relationship between breathing and pelvic floor movement.

Pelvic Floor “Drop” Practice (Reverse Kegels)

- Begin in a comfortable position
- Take a slow inhale
- Instead of lifting the pelvic floor, imagine letting it drop, soften, or melt downward
- Visualise the sit bones gently widening
- Exhale naturally without force
- Practice 6-10 slow breaths

Why?

Improves the ability to consciously relax the pelvic floor—an essential skill for effective pushing during birth.

Supported Deep Squat Breathing

- Use a wall, chair, or yoga block for support
- Lower into a comfortable squat position
- Inhale deeply, allowing the pelvic floor to lengthen
- Exhale slowly and stay relaxed
- Continue for 5-10 breaths

Why?

Encourages pelvic outlet opening and mimics functional positions often used during labour.

Child's Pose with Breath Awareness

- Kneel with knees wide and sit back onto heels (use cushions as needed)
- Rest your torso forward
- Inhale into the back of your ribs and pelvic floor
- Focus on softening and releasing tension
- Continue for 1-2 minutes

Why?

Promotes pelvic floor relaxation and reduces overall muscular tension in the pelvis and lower back.

Strength and Softness: Finding the Balance

A well-prepared pelvic floor during pregnancy is:

- Strong enough to support daily life
- Relaxed enough to lengthen for birth
- Coordinated with breathing and movement

Both strengthening and relaxation exercises should be practiced regularly to prepare your body for labour and recovery.

How Often?

- ✓ Daily if you notice pelvic floor tension, difficulty relaxing, pain, or discomfort
- ✓ 3-5 times per week as part of general birth preparation
- ✓ Can be practiced multiple times per day using breathing alone (e.g. before bed, during rest, or between workouts)

💡 Final Tip:

A pelvic floor that can fully relax and lengthen is essential for labour and birth.

Strength without relaxation can increase tension, delay effective pushing, and raise the risk of symptoms. The goal isn't to constantly "hold on" — it's to build a pelvic floor that knows when to lift and when to let go.

If you feel pain, pressure, or difficulty relaxing, prioritise lengthening work and seek guidance from a pelvic health physiotherapist.



Exercise & Pregnancy: A Season of Adaptation

Exercise is beneficial in all stages of life, and pregnancy is no exception. What does change, however, is the how and why behind your movement.

The How: Move safely and effectively. You are not fragile, nor are you invincible—you are adaptable.

Your capabilities and comfort levels will shift throughout your trimesters. Listen to your body, adjust as needed, and honor rest when necessary.

The Why: This season is not about chasing personal bests in strength, speed, or leanness. It's about you and your baby's overall well-being: physically and mentally.

Exercise can help reduce pregnancy risks, improve birthing outcomes, boost energy, and support postpartum recovery, but remember: fitness is a tool, not a guarantee. Many factors exist beyond our control.

I hope this guide has helped you feel empowered and confident in your active pregnancy journey.

Your body is truly incredible—nurturing and creating new life. Take care of yourself during this magical time.

Wishing you all the best in this chapter and the many beautiful ones to come.

Bridget xx