

Exercises To Prepare For Labor and Birth

This information should in no way replace the guidance and suggestions of your doctor or midwife. Always consult your doctor or midwife before beginning any exercise routine during pregnancy. If you experience dizziness, shortness of breath, faintness, vaginal bleeding, blurred vision, difficulty walking, contractions, or an unusual absence of fetal movements (but bear in mind that your baby is often most quiet when you're at your most active). Stop exercising immediately. If any of these symptoms continue after you've cooled down, call your doctor or midwife immediately.

Benefits of Exercise During Pregnancy

- Promotes muscle tone, strength, and endurance.
- Helps increase your body's ability to process and use oxygen.
- Improves circulation.
- Prepares you for the physical challenges of labor.
- Reduces physical discomforts during pregnancy. (Reduces backache, constipation, fatigue, swelling, and more.)
- Improves mood and self-image.
- Helps you sleep better.
- Pre-pregnancy shape returns quicker.

Great Exercises for Preparing for Labor and Birth

Walking-

Benefits- low impact, easy to adjust to fitness level, and listed benefits above.
30-45 minutes of good paced walking a day.

OR

Swimming-

Benefits- low impact, weightlessness helps relieve discomforts, easy to adjust to fitness level, helps with swelling, and listed benefits above.
30 minutes a day of easy lap swimming.

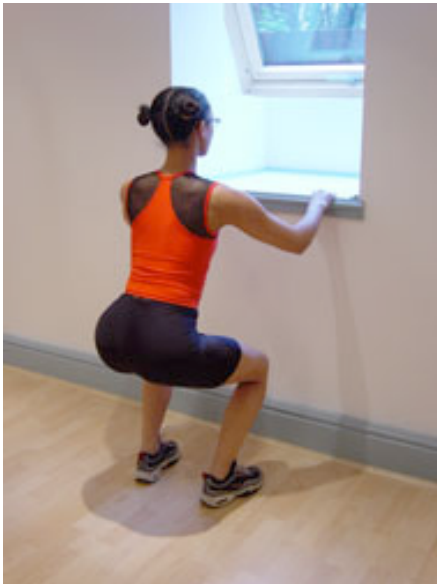
Yoga/ Stretching

Benefits- stretching the muscles decreases pregnancy discomforts (especially backache, sciatica, numbness, and tight muscles), increases flexibility, calms and relaxes body and mind, and listed benefits above.

Every other day or more often if needed. Classes for prenatal yoga can be found in the handout *Resource List* and are a great way to connect with other pregnant women.

Kegels

Benefits- strengthen pelvic floor muscles decreasing common interventions during the pushing stage, shortens the pushing stage, reduces urinary incontinence, decreases hemorrhoids, quicker healing after tear or episiotomy, increases sexual pleasure, and listed benefits above. Try to work up to 100 a day depending on your comfort and ease with the exercise. (Try doing a few every time you are waiting- stuck in traffic, in line at the grocery store, during commercials, etc.) A full description of this exercise can be found in the handout *Avoiding An Episiotomy*.



Squatting

Benefits- strengthens lower body, stretches lower body muscles, and opens up pelvis allowing optimal baby position, and listed benefits above.

Try 10-30 squats a day holding onto waist level support or sit in a squatting position until the position is no longer comfortable.

Pelvic Tilt Rock/ Angry Cat Stretch

Benefits- stretches lower back muscles decreasing backache, allows for optimal baby position, relaxes muscles, and listed benefits above.

Try 20- 30 slow gentle stretches right before bed.



© Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. All rights reserved.



© Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. All rights reserved.

Tailor Sitting/ Butterfly Stretches

Benefits- Increases circulation, decreases numbness and tingly sensations, stretches leg muscles, opens pelvis, loosens hips, improves posture, eases lower back pain.

Try sitting or stretching in this pose whenever you feel it would ease discomfort and/or a few times a day- (during commercials while watching TV, after sitting for long periods of time)