

personaltrainer

liz costigan



Exercising while pregnant

Knowing how to exercise is the best way to help ensure an easy pregnancy, writes **Liz Costigan**

KNOWING whether to exercise when pregnant can be tricky. It is hard to know what to do, and if what you are doing is safe for you and your baby.

The first and most important thing to do is to speak to your doctor about your fitness regimen to ensure that your workouts are safe for you and your baby. Listen to your body; you know what's best for you, so trust in that.

Generally, if you're a regular exerciser and your pregnancy is uncomplicated, you can continue working out as you did before, with a few modifications of course.

And if you have been an avid couch potato pre-pregnancy, don't worry, you too can safely start a gentle exercise programme once you have spoken to your doctor.

For all mums to be, beginners to advanced level, I highly recommend speaking to a fitness professional for advice on your programme; your goals will have changed considerably, and your capabilities too, so it is good to get some help.

Pregnancy isn't the time to try to lose weight or train for a marathon, but there is no reason why you can't work out at a moderate level.

Here are some tips to help you train safely while expecting.

WARM UP

When pregnant, your body produces a hormone called Relaxin, which loosens the ligaments in your body, making you less stable and more prone to sprains and injury. Warming up helps to prepare your muscles and joints and reduces the chance of injury.

AVOID CONTACT SPORTS

Avoid sports like football and activities that compromise your balance like horseback riding and skiing. Stick to stationary equipment in the gym like the cross trainer or bike. It is easy to overstretch

or strain yourself while pregnant, especially the joints in your pelvis and lower back so take it easy and avoid sudden, jerky movements.

EATING FOR TWO

When you exercise you burn calories so be sure to fuel up before and after exercising.

Most women need an extra 300 or so more calories a day than before they were pregnant and more than that if they're active. Remember: you are not trying to lose weight during pregnancy so don't be afraid to eat.

It can be tough for mums-to-be to find the balance; you want to have a safe and healthy pregnancy but it is hard seeing your body changing. By exercising during pregnancy you give yourself the best chance of having a healthy pregnancy, and by maintaining your fitness level during pregnancy, you are less likely to gain excess weight. Exercise also maintains your muscle tone and strength so that you can get your pre-baby body back in no time.

DRINK PLENTY OF WATER

Stay hydrated while exercising; drink water before, during and after your workout. Dehydration can cause nausea, premature contractions and can raise your body temperature to levels that are dangerous for you and your baby, especially during the first trimester when your baby's major organs are developing. Hydration is key, so drink lots of water.

DON'T LIE FLAT ON YOUR BACK

Avoid lying flat on your back after the first trimester. This position puts pressure on the vena cava, which will reduce blood to your heart, brain and uterus, making you dizzy or queasy.

DON'T OVERDO IT

Take it easy, you are exercising to stay healthy, not to push your body. A good rule of thumb is while



exercising you should be able to carry on a conversation. Always listen to your body, if you aren't feeling it, just don't do it.

GET UP FROM THE FLOOR SLOWLY

As your belly grows, your centre of gravity shifts. Be really careful when getting up as doing so too quickly can make you dizzy and cause you to fall.

COOL DOWN

At the end of your workout, take 5 to 10 minutes to cool down and do some light stretching. This allows your heart rate to get back to normal and helps to prevent sore muscles.

Be mindful of how your body feels before and while exercising, and if you have any of the below symptoms please stop immediately. Contact your doctor if the symptoms persist:

- Dizziness or feeling faint
- Deep back or pubic pain
- Muscle weakness
- Headache
- Chest pain
- Calf pain or swelling
- Swelling of the face, hands or feet
- Vaginal bleeding or fluid leakage
- Contractions (preterm labour)
- Decreased fetal movement
- Cramping in the lower abdomen
- Heart palpitations while at rest

Exercising while pregnant is supposed to make you feel better, so do what is best for you and your bump. It can be difficult for mums-to-be who are constantly faced with images of celebrities who seem to miraculously maintain their svelte shape while expecting.

Try not to put yourself under pressure to keep up with what you were doing before, or with what someone else has done. Enjoy this time, and use it to enjoy more gentle forms of exercise. Be kind to your body and your beautiful bump.

There is plenty of time to get back to those high intensity work outs once your baby is here.

You won't be pregnant forever, and before you know it you will be back on that spin bike getting yelled at by that crazy trainer.