

## Start!

If a woman becomes pregnant and has not had a structured fitness routine beforehand, she can start now – and should, since exercise helps to tone muscle, prevent gestational diabetes, aid digestion, and lower blood pressure. Begin with gentle exercises. As the due date approaches, remaining active can encourage the baby to move into proper birthing position. Walking is very beneficial, but pregnant women can run, bike, dance, and strength train as long as it still feels safe for her body. Key: Listen to your body and recognize limitations.

### Exercise to release endorphins.

Endorphins boost mood, improve self-esteem and sleep, and reduce anxiety, depression, stress, and pain. This can help mama enjoy her pregnancy.

### Yes to abs.

Exercising the entire core group of muscles will help prevent back and posture problems (caused by the growing belly), make labor pushing more effective, reduce risk of abdominal separation, and contribute to a speedy recovery. Keeping these muscles toned and active will help them return to their pre-pregnancy state far sooner. Research the safest types of ab exercises for each trimester and how to properly execute.

### Try yoga.

Yoga helps with strength, flexibility, and stress levels. Prenatal yoga, which includes safe modified poses, teaches the connection of breath and movement, encouraging women to let go of tension trigger points and helping them understand how the body moves and relaxes in an uncomfortable situation (both physically and mentally).



By Amy Griffith

# Pregnancy Fitness

## Myths, Truths, & Tips

**E**xercise during pregnancy is not only imperative to keep a mom-to-be physically and emotional healthy, but it can also benefit the child's lifelong health. According to research from the University of Virginia School of Medicine, exercise during pregnancy has a distinct molecular consequence on the unborn baby that essentially allows the child to be more fit. Other studies have shown that maintaining a healthy weight during pregnancy is tied to preventing childhood obesity.

Yet, many women harbor erroneous fears about prenatal exercise. Here are fitness tips for moms-to-be (with no applicable medical complications):

### Cardio is OK.

The old theory of not allowing your heart rate to exceed 140 beats per minute is no longer supported by the medical community. There is about a 50% increase in blood flow when a woman is pregnant, so the heart works much harder to deliver nutrients throughout the body, including the placenta. While a pregnant woman who is exercising may tire out more quickly, there is no evidence that such exertion is harmful to her baby. General rule of thumb: if you can continue to carry on a conversation while exercising, you're in the safe zone.

### Set a fitness mantra.

A mantra is a positive assertion – a word or phrase that you come back to daily to “check in” and be reminded that everything is ok and on course. Setting a mantra will help you trust your body, accept the changes that are occurring physically, quiet the ego, and encourage your acceptance of temporary fitness limitations. Examples: “I accept,” “I trust,” and “I am strong.”

### Massage to recover faster.

A carefully delivered massage from a prenatal massage specialist can alleviate pain in various parts of the body. Massage stretches and loosens muscles that become tight as baby grows and changes the body. Massage can relieve tension and/or swelling and is useful for lower back pain, headaches, and sciatica. When the body feels better, mom can maintain her health and regular exercise.

### Meditate.

Meditating can connect to a mantra or simply help to clear the mind, calm the nervous system, and lower blood

pressure. When in combination with a fitness regime, a mom can quiet down fears and open up to having a positive pregnancy and birth. Labor and delivery are certainly a physical experience, but many women say it is 90% mental. Allowing oneself to move inward and “step out of your own way” gives the body permission to do exactly what it knows how to do: birth baby! Meditation enables the mom-to-be to mentally surrender while exercise gives her physical strength and confidence.



Nationally certified Prenatal Yoga Instructor, Amy Griffith, is one of America's leading prenatal fitness and lifestyle experts. Visit [AmyGriffithworkout.com](http://AmyGriffithworkout.com).

Editor's Note: Consult your physician before beginning a prenatal exercise regime. 🍀

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