

Exercises for Pregnancy and Childbirth

During pregnancy, you can continue to exercise and get health benefits from even mild and moderate routines. It is best to exercise 3 to 5 times each week.

As with any time that you exercise, drink plenty of water and eat a healthful diet. Wear clothing that is comfortable. Dress so you do not get over heated.

Some special cautions for you to be aware of when exercising during pregnancy:

- Avoid exercising flat on your back after the first 3 months of your pregnancy. Many pregnant women have their heart function slow when they are flat on their backs.
- Avoid standing for long periods of time.
- Stop exercising when you are tired. Do not exercise until you feel exhausted.
- Avoid any type of exercise that can cause even mild trauma to the abdomen.
- Changes that occur in your body shape and size over your pregnancy will limit the types of exercise you can do safely as your balance changes.
- **Talk to your doctor about exercise during pregnancy if you have:**
 - ▶ Pregnancy induced hypertension (high blood pressure) or diabetes
 - ▶ Premature labor

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Learn more about your health care.

- ▶ Maternal heart disease
- ▶ Premature rupture of membranes
- ▶ Vaginal bleeding of any amount
- ▶ Incompetent cervix or a cerclage
- ▶ Intrauterine growth retardation
- ▶ Placenta Previa

Many of the changes that take place in your body during pregnancy are there for 4 to 6 weeks after you deliver. Your pre-pregnancy exercise routine should be started up again slowly, based on your overall recovery.

Full Body Stretch

This exercise helps you warm up by stretching your whole body.

1. Lie on your back or stand.
2. Straighten out your arms and legs.
3. Point your toes and stretch out your fingers.
4. Then pull toes up toward your knees. Hold for 5 seconds.
5. Relax and let arms and legs go limp.
6. Repeat 3 times.



Neck Stretch

This stretch helps keep your neck muscles flexible.

Position 1

1. Sit on the floor with your ankles crossed.
2. Look down and place your hand on the back of your neck.



3. Gently push down until you feel a stretch in the back of your neck.
4. Repeat slowly three times.

Position 2

1. While sitting on the floor with ankles crossed, turn your head to the right.
2. Place your right hand on your cheek and gently push your head more to the right.
3. Repeat to the left with the left hand.
4. Repeat slowly on each side 3 times.



Position 3

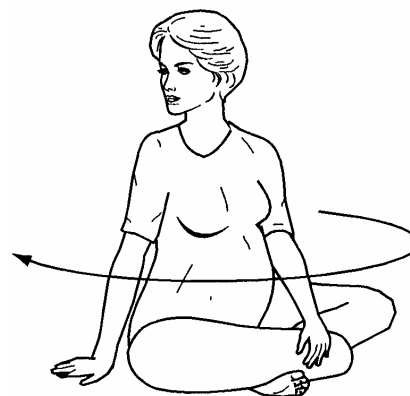
1. While still on the floor with ankles crossed, put your right hand on top of your head.
2. Pull your head gently so that your right ear gets closer to your shoulder.
3. Switch and repeat.
4. Do each side 3 times.



Full Body Twist

This exercise will stretch your waist, upper body and neck. It helps to keep your spine or backbone more flexible.

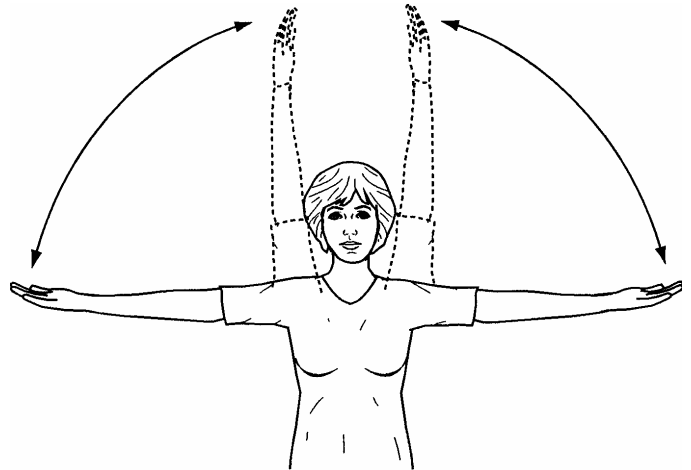
1. Sit on the floor with your legs bent at the knees and crossed in front of you.
2. Place your left hand on your right knee and twist to your right.
3. Put your right palm on the floor behind you next to your spine with your elbow straight.
4. Inhale slowly, then exhale.
5. Switch and twist to the left.
6. Repeat 2 times on each side.



Shoulder, Arm and Upper Back Stretch

This stretch will help your range of motion and flexibility in your shoulders, arms and upper back.

1. Sit with your back against the wall and have your legs out straight in front of you.
2. Straighten your arms out at shoulder level and keep your palms facing up.
3. Drag your arms slowly up the wall, keeping your arms touching the wall.
4. Hold at the point where your arms want to push away from the wall for 10 seconds.
5. Lower your arms slowly and relax.
6. Repeat 3 times.



Kegel Exercises

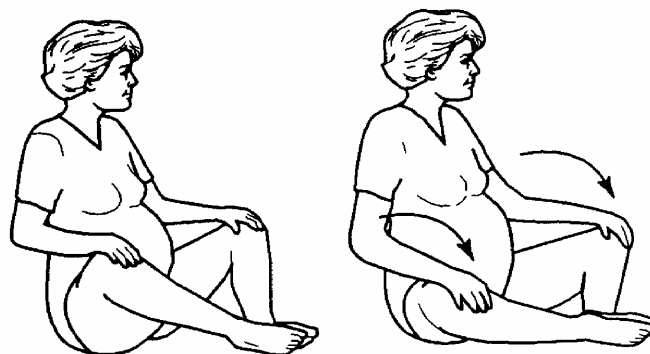
Kegel exercises strengthen the muscles around the vagina, urethra and rectum. You will be able to control these muscles if you practice these exercises.

- To locate these muscles, stop and start your urine when you use the toilet.
- Try to tighten the muscles a small amount at a time. Think of an elevator going up to the 10th floor. Then release very slowly, one "floor" at a time.
- As you tighten the muscles, you should feel the area from your urethra, where urine exits your body, to the rectum lift slightly.
- Practice these exercises while you sit, stand, walk, drive or watch TV.
- Do these exercises three times each day. Start with five repetitions and work up to 10-15 repetitions, 5-10 times a day.

Knee Press

The knee press strengthens and stretches your inner thighs and stretches your lower back.

1. Sit on the floor and pull your feet together with the soles touching. Bring your feet as near to your body as you can with comfort.
2. Keep your back straight. Press your knees slowly and gently to the floor. Hold your knees in this position and breathe out as you count to three.
3. Repeat 5 times.



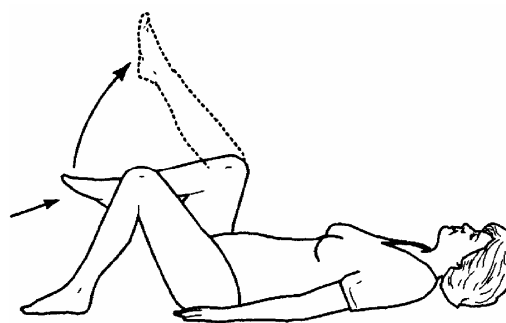
Practice the knee press several times a day. This can be done sitting on the floor with good back support while you are watching TV.

Slowly work up to doing this exercise for 5 repetitions, 2-3 times a day.

Hamstring Stretch

This stretches the hamstring muscle on the back of your thigh.

1. Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor. Press the small of your back into the floor.
2. Bring one knee, as close as you can, to your chest.
3. Raise your leg in the air.
4. Bend your knee and return your foot to the floor.
5. Do the same exercise with your other leg.
6. Repeat 5 times on each side.

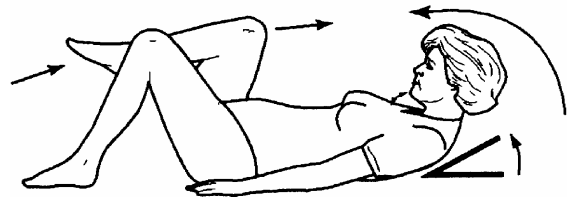


Abdominal Exercises

Abdominal exercises will strengthen and stretch your abdominal (stomach) muscles and improve your circulation. Exercises done while lying on your back should only be done during your first 3 months of pregnancy.

Knee Reach

1. Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Breathe out as you come up and breathe in as you return to a starting position with this exercise.
3. Lift your head as you move one knee towards your nose. Bring your knee as close as you can to your nose. Keep your neck in a relaxed position, as if you have an orange tucked under your chin. Do not jut your neck forward.
4. Do the same exercise with your other leg.
5. Repeat 5 times, 2 or 3 times a day.



The Pelvic Rock

Pelvic rock exercises will strengthen your abdominal muscles and help relieve backaches.

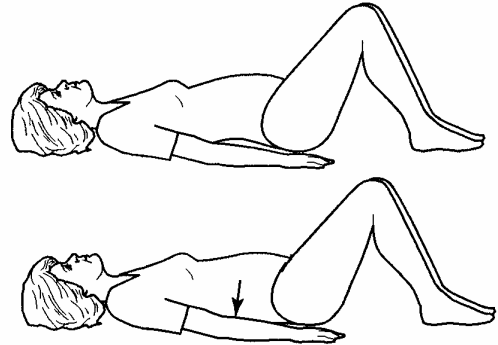
There are three ways to do this exercise. You will use a new position for each exercise.

- Each time you do this exercises, tighten your abdominal muscles.
- Tuck your buttocks under so the small of your back is pushed back as far as possible.
- If this causes any back discomfort, stop the exercise.

Position 1

Only do this exercise during your first 3 months of pregnancy.

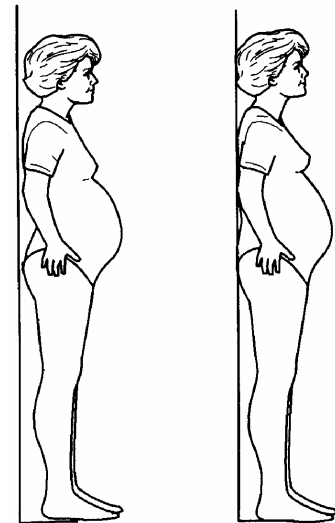
1. Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Tighten your lower abdominal muscles and your buttocks so the small of your back is pressed onto the floor.
3. Breathe out as you press down and in as you relax.
4. Repeat this exercise slowly and evenly.



Position 2

This exercise can safely be done throughout pregnancy.

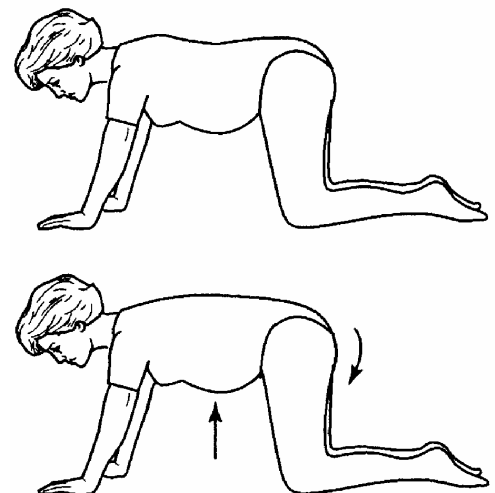
1. Stand with your back against a wall.
2. Tighten your abdominal muscles and tuck in your buttocks so the small of your back is flat against the wall.
3. Put your hands on your hips to feel your hips rock back toward the wall.
4. Breathe out as you press against the wall and in as you relax.



Position 3

This exercise can safely be done throughout pregnancy.

1. Get on your hands and knees and keep your arms straight.
2. Tighten your abdominal muscles and tuck your buttocks under. Your back will hunch up a little. Then relax your muscles.
3. Breathe out as you tuck and in as you relax.

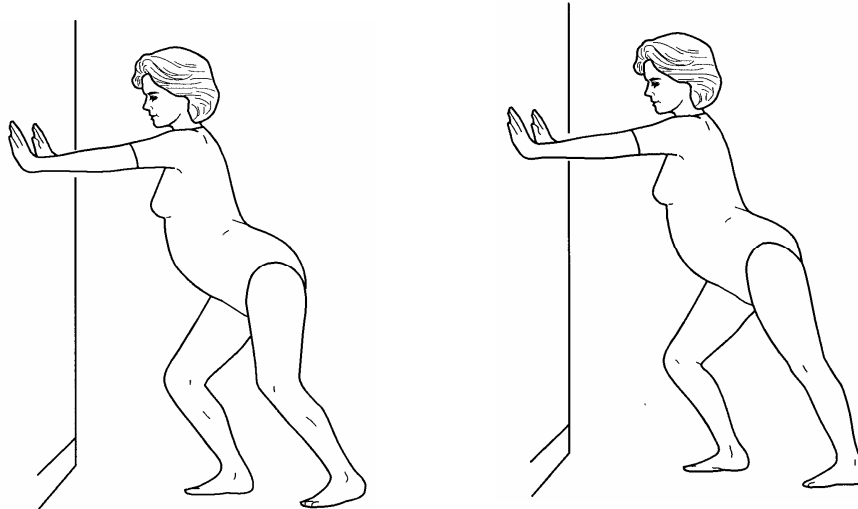


4. Do this exercise slowly and evenly.
5. Repeat each of these positions 10 times, 2 times a day.

Calf Stretch

This exercise stretches your calf muscles on the back of your lower leg and the front thigh muscles.

1. Stand with your hands on the wall.
2. Straighten your left leg behind you.
3. With your feet pointing straight forward, lean into the wall until you feel stretching in your calf muscles.
4. Hold for 10 seconds.
5. From the same position, bend your back knee and hold for 10 seconds.
6. Switch and stretch the other leg.
7. Repeat 3 times for each leg.



- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**