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Training for the Main Event: A Trimester-by-Trimester Workout Guide

by Ann Douglas

Your body will undergo some remarkable changes over the next nine months, so it only makes sense that your workout will change, too. Here's what you need to know to stay healthy and active while you prepare your body for the mother of all marathons – giving birth.

First Trimester

Finding it hard to drag yourself off the couch, let alone think about hitting the gym? You're certainly in good company. First-trimester complaints like fatigue and nausea can stop even the most committed fitness enthusiast in her tracks. While exercise can be a great pick-me-up, sometimes it makes more sense to give in to your need for extra rest. Don't beat yourself up about it.

Assuming you do feel well enough to continue to exercise, here are some important pointers to keep in mind:

- **Discuss your workout plans with your doctor or midwife.** Not every pregnant woman is a good candidate for a prenatal fitness program. If your pregnancy is considered high risk, your doctor or midwife may suggest that you modify your existing exercise program or skip your workouts entirely until after your baby is born.
- **Ensure that your workout is pregnancy-friendly.** That means avoiding high-risk activities such as hang-gliding or deep-sea diving that could result in injury or a lack of oxygen to your baby.
- **Wear a well-fitting bra.** As you've no doubt noticed by now, your breasts are getting bigger and heavier. If the bra you're wearing doesn't provide enough support, you could overstretch and permanently damage the ligaments that support your breasts.
- **Keep your water bottle handy** so you can drink before, during, and after exercise.
- **Breathe while you're exercising.** Holding your breath increases your blood pressure – something that isn't good for you or your baby.
- **Avoid becoming overheated.** Raising your body's core temperature too high could increase the risk that your baby might develop certain types of brain and spinal cord abnormalities. As a rule of thumb, you should be able to carry on a conversation while you're working out. If you're huffing and puffing too much to be able to do that, it's time to ease up a little.

- **Know when to wave the white flag.** Stop exercising immediately if you experience persistent uterine contractions; back pain or pubic pain that gets worse when you exercise; bloody discharge or a sudden gush of fluid from the vagina; unexplained abdominal pain; swelling of the ankles, hands, or face; headaches or vision disturbances; dizziness or faintness; extreme fatigue; heart palpitations, chest pain, or shortness of breath; and/or changes to the amount of fetal movement.

Second Trimester

The first-trimester fatigue and nausea are (hopefully) a thing of the past and the third-trimester aches and pains have yet to kick in. Is it any wonder that the second trimester is considered to be the best trimester for working out? The biggest challenges you'll face at this stage of the game are your changing centre of gravity (something that can throw off your balance and increase your susceptibility to injury) and the looseness of the joints and ligaments in your pelvis (Mother Nature's way of increasing the dimensions of your pelvis to make it easier for you to give birth).

Here's what you need to know to take advantage of your newfound burst of energy:

- **Rather than attempting floor exercises** that might leave you susceptible to injury – deep knee bends, full sit-ups, double-leg raises, and straight-leg raises are all no-nos during pregnancy – zero in on exercises that will help prepare your body for giving birth: squatting, pelvic tilting and rocking, abdominal curl-ups, and pelvic floor exercises.
- **Avoid exercising flat on your back after the fourth month of pregnancy.** The weight of your growing baby and your uterus might impede blood flow to your heart, leading to dizziness and possibly fainting.
- **If back pain starts to become a problem for you,** work on your abdominal muscles. The weaker your abdominal muscles are, the harder your back has to work to keep your body upright.
- **Check for abdominal muscle separation.** If you feel a ridge running from your pubic bone to your belly button that is more than two fingerwidths wide, you will need to modify your exercise routine to prevent further muscle separation.

Prenatal Fitness Best Bets

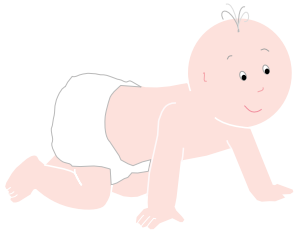
Wondering what types of workouts are best while you've got a baby on board? Most prenatal fitness experts give top marks to walking, stationary cycling, swimming, aquafit, stair machines, and low-impact aerobics. Resistance training is also considered safe for most women, but you'll want to avoid any heavy weightlifting.

Of course, these aren't the only types of activities that you can enjoy during pregnancy. A lot of moms-to-be swear by yoga and Pilates. Just be aware that you may have to modify your regular routine to make these activities a bit more baby-friendly: e.g., avoiding overstretching or any exercises that require you to lie flat on your back after the fourth month of pregnancy.

Third Trimester

Sleep problems, your increased weight, and a smorgasbord of other pregnancy-related aches and pains may be taking their toll on your energy level. While you might be tempted to throw in the towel, grab that towel and head to the pool for an aquafit class instead!

You'll reap plenty of benefits by remaining physically active throughout your pregnancy. Studies have shown that exercising during pregnancy improves your overall level of health and fitness, provides you with an energy boost, makes it easier for you to cope with stress, and can help to improve your posture, balance, and coordination. It can also help to relieve back pain and muscle tension; prevent varicose veins, leg cramps, hemorrhoids, and such pregnancy-related complications as gestational diabetes and preeclampsia; keep your weight gain on target; encourage you to accept – perhaps even celebrate! – your changing body size and shape; reduce the length of your recovery after the birth; and (perhaps the best reason ever invented for hitting the gym) reduce the amount of time you spend in labor. So hit the pool instead of the couch. Your body will thank you for it.



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Energy In, Energy Out...

Exercising for two also means eating for two. Here's how to tackle the biggest nutritional challenge you'll face during each trimester.

First trimester: Morning sickness

Don't hit the panic button if you're unable to stomach anything more exciting than soda crackers. Your body will draw upon its nutritional stores to meet the needs of your growing baby. Besides, your body only needs an extra 100 calories per day during the first trimester – the equivalent of the proverbial apple a day.

Second trimester: A ravenous appetite

Now that you're feeling a little less queasy, this is the perfect time to make healthy eating a priority again. That means zeroing in on nutrient-rich foods. You have an extra 300 calories to "spend" on food each day during the second and third trimesters, so try to get maximum bang for your nutritional buck.

Third trimester: Feeling full

You'll feel full sooner because your uterus is pressing up against your stomach. The solution? Try eating small quantities of food throughout the day rather than trying to shovel down large quantities of food all at once.