

## EXERCISE IN PREGNANCY

*All women are encouraged to exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy. In particular, aerobic and strength training exercise is recommended. Your physiotherapist and your doctor can guide you with your exercise programme.*

### **Can I exercise if I have a medical condition?**

Talk to your healthcare provider before beginning a programme of exercise as there are some medical conditions that require medical supervision while exercising. Your healthcare provider may recommend that you complete a health screening prior to commencing exercise. The PARmed-X for pregnancy (Physical Activity Readiness Medical Examination) is a guideline to health screening that is often used.

### **What are the benefits of exercise during pregnancy?**

There are many physical and psychological health benefits to remaining physically active throughout your pregnancy. Benefits of pregnancy exercise include improved fitness and weight maintenance, increased muscle tone, strength and endurance. Exercise may prevent and treat gestational diabetes mellitus, may relieve lower back pain, constipation, reduce ankle swelling and varicose veins. In addition, it prepares your body for labour and promotes a sense of wellbeing.

### **What exercise is recommended during pregnancy?**

Aerobic and strength conditioning exercise is recommended during pregnancy.

Examples of aerobic exercise, known as cardiovascular exercise include brisk walking, jogging/running, swimming, dancing, aerobics and aqua aerobics.

Examples of strength conditioning exercise include resistance training or weightlifting and flexibility exercises. It is also recommended that you commence or continue pelvic floor muscle training to prevent urinary and faecal incontinence. Your physiotherapist can teach and guide you in pelvic floor muscle training.

### **What exercise is not recommended during pregnancy?**

You can discuss your specific exercise with your healthcare provider (doctor or physiotherapist) to clarify any risk and modify the exercise if necessary. It is not recommended to exercise while lying flat on your back after week 16 of pregnancy.

You should avoid exercises with a risk of abdominal injury. These include squash, soccer, and basketball. You should also avoid exercises with a high risk of falling. These include gymnastics, horse riding, downhill skiing and cycling.

Scuba diving should be avoided during pregnancy.

**What is the recommended duration and frequency of exercise?**

Usually, 30 minutes exercise on most, if not all days of the week is recommended. If 30 minutes in the same session is not possible, then this time can be divided into 10 or more minute sessions to make up 30 minutes e.g. 3 x 10 minute sessions or 2 x 15 minute sessions.

**How do I ensure I exercise at a safe intensity?**

Make sure you do a warm-up and cool-down.

Do the 'talk' test. While exercising you should always be able to carry out a conversation. If you are too breathless to do this you are exercising too hard.

Use the Borg scale to rate your perceived exertion. Perceived exertion is how hard you feel your body is working or the intensity of your exercise. It is based on physical sensations you feel during exercise, including increased heart rate, increased breathing rate, increased sweating and muscle fatigue. The scale ranges from 6 to 20. You should aim for a rating of between 12 to 14 on the scale. This means 'somewhat hard' and indicates that you are exercising at a moderate intensity. Use the scale to speed up or slow down your movements to reach your desired range.

**Website version 1 – August 2011**

***Extract from the Obesity & Pregnancy Clinical Practice Guideline by the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Royal College of Physicians of Ireland and the Clinical Strategy and Programmes Directorate, Health Service Executive.***