



ANTENATAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXERCISE

How many weeks pregnant are you? After the first trimester it is generally not encouraged for you to lie on your back for extended periods of time due to the risk of **Supine Hypotensive (low blood pressure) Syndrome**. ACOG (American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists), 1994 and 2002 recommends against exercising in the supine position after the first trimester (see **Resources** below).

Have you been exercising regularly? If you have not been exercising regularly up to now it is not generally advisable for you to start now until after the birth. Focus on walking, breathing and pelvic floor exercises.

Are you attending an antenatal class? It is very important for you to participate in classes with other pregnant women as your pregnancy progresses so that you can gain the support and empathy of others. In addition you need to learn how your body is changing during the pregnancy and adapt your exercise accordingly. For example:

Changes in Centre of Gravity- particularly in latter trimesters, the body adapts to allow for the growing foetus and balance can be affected.

Relaxin, estrogen, and progesterone changes – growth of uterine and breast tissue, reduction in smooth muscle tone, and a softening of the ligaments surrounding the joints. Laxity around the joints can increase the risk of injury so sudden changes of direction should be avoided. However research suggests that stretching is very low-risk and many women find yoga particularly helpful.

Intra-abdominal Pressure Increases – avoid extended static contractions, breath-holding during lifts, and prolonged standing in one position.

Other issues to consider:

Supportive bra – you will need to get re-measured several times throughout your pregnancy (M&S and John Lewis offer a good service). www.lessbounce.com also has an excellent maternity section.

Temperature regulation – you should avoid getting too hot or dehydrated. Keep your body temperature regulated by wearing layers, keeping the exercise intensity lower, and drinking plenty of fluids.

Emotional changes – your hormones will be playing riot with you! Pay attention to how you feel but try to keep a good routine of activity, play, rest, fresh air, etc going regardless of your mood state. Your body image will change and it is helpful if you spend some time now thinking about how you might tackle this.

Changing your activity – you might find that there are some exercise classes that you can adapt and continue attending until late on in the pregnancy but be prepared to find alternatives.

Resources:

“Pre-and Post-Natal Fitness” by Lenita Anthony (American Council on Exercise)

“The Effects of Antenatal Exercise on Psychological Well-being, Pregnancy and Birth Outcomes” by Jean Rankin

“Pregnancy and Fitness: All You Need to Know to Exercise Safely and Effectively Throughout Pregnancy” by Cherry Baker

Exercising Through Your Pregnancy by James F Clapp & M D Clapp III

http://www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk/healthservice/maternity/resources_mat_leafs.cfm?topic=rights

ACOG Guidelines for Exercise: <http://www.birthingnaturally.net/exercise/acog.html>

The Edinburgh Birth Resource Centre <http://www.birthresourcecentre.org.uk>