

## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Advice on Exercising when Pregnant

### Is it safe to exercise when pregnant?

For most women the answer is yes, and exercise is actively encouraged. The government released guidelines in 2019 regarding physical activity in pregnant women which advises to aim for 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. When you are moderately exercising, you should still be able to hold a conversation with someone.

When you are exercising it is important to listen to your body and adapt the exercise if it is causing discomfort.

### What are the benefits of Exercising?

- Improved sleep
- Improved mood
- Improves fitness
- Helps to control weight gain
- Helps to reduce high blood pressure issues
- Helps to prevent pregnancy related diabetes

### When should I not exercise?

If you have any of the following, exercise is not advisable - unless you have spoken to your midwife / GP, gynaecologist or obstetrician and have been told otherwise:

- Vaginal bleeding
- Reduced baby (Foetal) movement
- Any heart/lung/kidney/thyroid disease
- History of recurrent miscarriage or premature labour or 'small for dates' baby
- Poorly controlled Type1 Diabetes Mellitus (DM)

You are advised to speak to your midwife, GP, gynaecologist or obstetrician prior to starting exercise, in the following situations. If you:

- Have been told that you have a placenta lying low in the uterus (placenta praevia) after 26 weeks of pregnancy or early placenta praevia
- Have unstable blood pressure (high or low)
- Lack of iron in your blood (anaemia)
- Have Type1 Diabetes Mellitus
- Are extremely overweight or underweight
- Are a heavy smoker
- Have pelvic and/or low back pain

The above information was taken from the Pelvic Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy Group regarding Advice and Guidance for Exercise in the Childbearing Years.

### What Positions Should I avoid when Exercising?

Once you are over 19 weeks in your pregnancy or your baby bump is showing then you should avoid lying on your back for long periods of time as this can affect your blood flow, along with putting increased pressure on your joints.

### What bodily changes should I look out for when exercising?

If you experience any signs or symptoms on the list below when exercising, stop straight away and phone your midwifery team.

- Tummy pain
- Pain in the Calf
- Difficulty walking
- Bleeding from the vagina
- Persistent and severe headaches

For more information please refer to the Pelvic Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy Group regarding Advice and Guidance for Exercise in the Childbearing Years.

### Are there any forms of exercise I should avoid?

It is advised that you avoid any contact sport, like rugby, hockey and possibly football. It is also advised to avoid any sports with a high risk of falling like skiing, snowboarding and horse-riding.

### What sports can I do when I am pregnant?

Walking, cycling, gentle swimming and gentle gym-based exercises like walking on a treadmill can be very beneficial.

Yoga, pilates or aqua natal exercise can be very beneficial if taught by a qualified professional.

Examples of moderate exercise which you can do at home; climbing stairs, carrying the shopping bags, dancing and going for a walk.

If you suffer from any pelvic girdle pain you can self-refer to our physiotherapy service - phone 0300 0040335 or email [tsdft.physio.pelvichealth@nhs.net](mailto:tsdft.physio.pelvichealth@nhs.net)

For more information on pelvic girdle pain and useful videos please put in the internet search bar - *Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust Pelvic Health Physiotherapy*

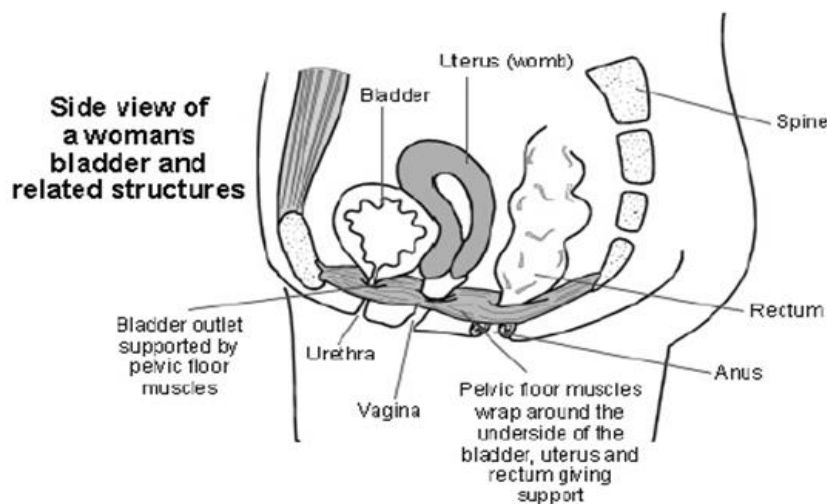
### Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

Your pelvic floor muscle exercises should be done throughout your pregnancy and after the delivery of your baby. Doing these exercises will help to prevent urinary leakage along with other problems associated with pelvic floor muscles.

The pelvic floor muscle forms a bowl in the bottom of our pelvis. Their main job is:

- to help you control your bladder and bowel
- to support your bladder, womb and bowel

For more information on the pelvic floor muscles and useful videos please put in the internet search bar - *Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust Pelvic Health Physiotherapy*



### How do I do Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises?

1. Your back passage is right in the middle of your pelvic floor muscle, to activate them start by gently trying to closing your back passage as if you are trying to hold in wind – can you feel a twitch?
2. Next try and activate the front portion of your pelvic floor muscle, by trying to imagine holding in a wee – can you feel a twitch?
3. Then try holding in wind and holding in a wee at the same time. You should feel the muscles “squeeze and lift”

You can do this in any position – we would advise you to start these exercises while lying in a semi recumbent (which is halfway between lying flat and sitting up right) on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed, or in a side lying position in bed, then to slowly progress to doing these exercises in sitting, then standing which is the hardest.

Try and avoid, holding your breath, pulling your tummy in (a slight tightening is fine), squeezing your legs together, or tightening your buttocks.

Only the pelvic floor muscle should be working. The exercises are often referred to as a ‘secret exercise’ - no one can see that you are doing them. DO NOT try to stop the flow of urine when passing urine.

## How do I exercise my Pelvic Floor Muscle?

There are two exercises you need to do to strengthen the pelvic floor muscle.

1. Exercise one (Endurance) Slowly tighten and lift the pelvic floor muscle and hold for as many seconds as comfort allows (your goal is to aim for 10 seconds, we do not expect you do this initially) repeat this endurance exercise up to 10 times
2. Exercise two (Fast) Tighten and relax the pelvic floor muscle as quickly as you can (holding for approximately 1 second). Make sure you relax completely in-between each squeeze (your goal is to aim to repeat this up to 10 times)

Alongside working on your pelvic floor muscle strength, it is also important to spend a short period every day concentrating on your breathing and relaxing your pelvic floor muscle.

## How often should I do these exercises?

You should aim to do these exercises two to five times per day.

## How can I use my Pelvic Floor Muscles during the day?

When you cough, sneeze, laugh or pick something up, remember to tighten your pelvic floor muscle before and during these activities. This technique is called “the knack”. It can be used to try and reduce straining of the pelvic floor muscle and prevent leakage of urine.

## References

[www.thepogp.co.uk/patient\\_information/womens\\_health/advice\\_guidance\\_for\\_exercise\\_in\\_the\\_childbearing\\_years.aspx](http://www.thepogp.co.uk/patient_information/womens_health/advice_guidance_for_exercise_in_the_childbearing_years.aspx)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-pregnancy-and-after-childbirth/physical-activity-for-pregnant-women-text-of-the-infographic](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-pregnancy-and-after-childbirth/physical-activity-for-pregnant-women-text-of-the-infographic)

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For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.