

## **EXERCISE GUIDELINES FOR PREGNANCY, POSTPARTUM, AND BEYOND**

An increasing number of women engage in regular aerobic exercise, strength training, and recreational sports, and many choose to continue these activities during pregnancy. Some women decide to begin an exercise program during pregnancy as part of a commitment to a healthier lifestyle.

*Physical exercise enhances muscular strength, endurance and flexibility, and improves cardiovascular health. Potential benefits of exercise during pregnancy include an enhanced self-image and sense of well-being, maintenance or improvement of fitness, fewer physical discomforts such as headache, backache, and fatigue, and less likelihood of excessive weight gain. Exercise can also be an important adjunct therapy for achieving control of blood glucose levels in women with gestational diabetes mellitus.*

### **EXERCISE GUIDELINES**

Prenatal exercise guidelines are designed to prevent fetal injury and maternal exhaustion, hyperthermia, musculoskeletal injury, and hypotension. Intended to meet the needs of the majority of pregnant women, they may need to be individualized according to levels of fitness and conditioning.

#### **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Regular, aerobic exercise of mild-to-moderate intensity for 30 to 45 minutes at least three times per week is preferable to intermittent activity or a sudden increase in exercise level.**
- *If an exercise regimen is initiated in pregnancy, the intensity and duration of exercise should be increased gradually.*
- *Strenuous exercise should last no longer than 25 minutes.*
- *The intensity of exercise should taper off as pregnancy progresses (eg, brisk walking instead of running, tennis doubles instead of singles).*
- *Intensity should be light enough to allow conversation during exercise.*
- *Exercise should be preceded by an extended warm-up and followed by a cool-down period (10 to 15 minutes of walking, stationary bicycling at low resistance) and gentle stretching.*
- *Exercise should be scheduled for the cooler part of the day in light clothing. Ample fluid intake is important before, during, and after exercise to reduce the likelihood of hyperthermia and dehydration.*
- *Carbohydrates (milk, fruit, juice, grains) should be consumed before and after exercise to prevent hypoglycemia.*
- *Caloric intake should be adequate to support exercise and promote optimal weight gain.*
- *Prenatal exercise programs should be taught by qualified instructors. Exercises generally considered safe during pregnancy are listed in Table 1.*

## **EXERCISE PRECAUTIONS**

### **The following conditions and activities should be avoided:**

- *Vigorous exercise during hot, humid weather, or while febrile.*
- *Sitting in a sauna, whirlpool bath, hot tub.*
- *Exercising while fatigued or to the point of exhaustion.*
- *Exercises that strain the lower back, stress ligaments, injure knees, or promote separation of the symphysis pubis. These include sit-ups, toe touches, squats, deep knee bends, bouncing, rapid, jerky movements, or quick changes in direction.*
- *Holding the breath or straining (Valsalva maneuver).*
- *Exercising in the supine position after the first trimester.*
- *Heavy resistance on weight machines or use of heavy free weights.*
- *Marathon or distance running, except for elite athletes.*

*Exercise should be stopped and the physician's office contacted when any of the following occur: numbness, abdominal pain, vaginal bleeding or fluid loss, uterine contractions, or absent fetal movement.*

## **POSTPARTUM EXERCISE**

Ligaments and joints may remain soft and vulnerable to injury for 10 to 12 weeks postpartum. Some of the cardiovascular changes associated with pregnancy may also persist for 4 to 6 weeks postpartum. In women with uncomplicated deliveries, a gradual return to pre-pregnancy exercise levels, as tolerated, will assure comfort and safety. Walking may be initiated as soon as desired.

# HARBOUR WOMEN'S HEALTH



<b><u>TABLE 1</u></b>	<b><u>TABLE 2</u></b>	<b><u>TABLE 3</u></b>
<b>EXERCISES GENERALLY CONSIDERED SAFE DURING PREGNANCY</b>	<b>EXERCISES NOT CONSIDERED SAFE DURING PREGNANCY</b>	<b>CONTRAINDICATIONS TO EXERCISE DURING PREGNANCY</b>
Bicycling (Stationary if balance is hard to maintain)	Competitive Sports	Pregnancy-Induced Hypertension
Bowling	Contact Sports	Severe Anemia
Dancing	Distance of Marathon Running	Cardiac Disease
Golf	Diving	Cervical Incompetence / Cerclage
Jogging	Downhill Skiing	Extreme Underweight
Light- Weight Training	Gymnastics	Significantly Inadequate Weight Gain
Low-Impact Aerobics	Heavy-Weight Training	Hemoglobinopathies
Pregnancy Conditioning Exercises	high-Impact Aerobics	Three or More Spontaneous Abortions
Rowing	Horseback Riding	Intrauterine Growth Retardation
Running	Ice Skating	Severe Infection
Swimming	Mountain Climbing	Multiple Gestation
Pregnancy Exercise Programs	Racquetball	Placenta Previa
Tennis	Rollerblading	Polyhydramnios
Walking	Roller-skating	Preterm Labor (Current or Prior Pregnancy)
Water Aerobics	Scuba Diving	Renal Disease
	Sky Diving	Preterm Rupture of Membranes
	Surfing	Seizure Disorder
	Water Skiing	Thyroid Disease
		Uncontrolled Diabetes Mellitus