Key points for all pregnant women

It is important for all pregnant women to perform pelvic floor muscle exercises daily and especially if you are undertaking physical activity which can put strain on the pelvic floor muscles. This is of particular importance if you may be predisposed to pelvic floor weakness e.g. high BMI, previous pregnancies.

Being physically active during pregnancy is generally safe for you and your baby, even if you were not active before pregnancy - activities such as walking, swimming and central core muscle exercises are safe and recommended.

**CAUTION:** Women with a long term medical condition, high risk pregnancy or a BMI over 40 should discuss their plans for physical activity with a midwife before commencing a physical activity or exercise.
• Physical activity should be individualised according to your abilities.

• Be sensible and listen to your body, remember activity or exercise doesn’t need to be strenuous to be beneficial.

• Choose to be active in a way that fits into your daily routine (e.g. get off the bus a stop early, use the stairs, do the housework).

• If you are taking part in a class run by an instructor, always check they have the appropriate qualification to teach the class safely, and tell them that you are pregnant. Ask them if you should make any modifications to any of the exercises. Confirm this information will be treated sensitively.

• Warm up and cool down and drink plenty of water and other fluids.

• Do not eat a big meal immediately prior to exercise and eat afterwards according to how hungry you feel.

• Wear layered clothing to assist heat loss, a supportive bra and appropriate footwear.

CAUTION: If you have any unusual symptoms, pain or discomfort during activity you should gradually cool down and/or stop and seek advice from a midwife.

If there are any changes to your health during pregnancy always check with the midwife that your physical activity is still appropriate.
Benefits of Being Active During Pregnancy

Being active can keep your body and mind healthy, which will benefit you and your baby.

Benefits include:

- Improved mood.
- Reduced stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue.
- More energy and ease of movement.
- Helps to maintain a healthy weight.
- Shorter and less complications during labour.
- Reduced risk of miscarriage.
- May help with back pain or pelvic pain.
- Reduced risk of varicose veins
- Reduced risk of incontinence (if you practice pelvic floor exercises every day).

Physical activity does not increase chances of:

- Low-birth weight baby.
- Premature birth.
- Early pregnancy loss.
- Reduced breast milk volume or quality.
How active should I be?

All adults of whatever age should aim to be active daily

- You may need to slow down as your pregnancy progresses. If you are unable to hold a conversation whilst exercising then you are probably exercising too hard.

- The amount and intensity of physical activity you undertake will depend on your starting point and you should aim to build up gradually to the recommended levels.

- Being active at moderate-intensity (e.g. brisk walking) over a week, should add up to at least 2½ hours* and needs to be done in bouts of 10 minutes or more. One way to manage this is to build up to 30 minutes on at least 5 days a week.
## How much effort?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensity of exercise</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sedentary</td>
<td>I am using no effort</td>
<td>• Sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lying down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>I am talking easily but my heart beat has increased slightly</td>
<td>• Walking –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strolling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cleaning and dusting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (medium effort)</td>
<td>I need to take a few extra breaths while chatting and walking. My heart is</td>
<td>• Walking – brisk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>beating faster, I feel warmer.</td>
<td>• Straight line / stationary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>activities (swimming, jogging,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cycling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hoovering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigorous (higher effort)</td>
<td>I am unable to chat without taking big breaths in between</td>
<td>• Running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My heart is beating fast, I feel warmer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Active before pregnancy

It is safe to continue your pre-pregnancy routine at moderate/vigorous levels up to 45 minutes four times per week. Please refer to key points for section for more information.

Activity during pregnancy should be to maintain your fitness level not improve fitness.

You may need to slow down as your pregnancy progresses or as the maternity team advises.
Inactive or sedentary before pregnancy

If you have been inactive or have a mainly sedentary lifestyle (e.g. sitting a lot at work and at home) you might like to start with 15 minutes of continuous physical activity three times a week gradually working towards 30 minutes four times weekly at low/moderate levels.

Avoid starting activity at vigorous/higher effort levels.
Activities which may be beneficial in pregnancy include:

- Walking (gentle) on level ground with good fitting shoes is a good activity.
- Swimming although avoid breast stroke when swimming as leg movements can stress pelvic joints. Back stroke/front crawl strokes may be easier or breast stroke arms and paddle legs.
- Gentle core stability exercises drawing in your lower abdominals and drawing up your pelvic floor muscles.
- Gentle exercising on a gym ball or sitting and rocking.
- Avoid head lifts and twisting crunches as exercises in pregnancy.
- Exercises in supine position (lying face upward) should be avoided during the second half of pregnancy to prevent lowering blood pressure.
Muscle strengthening

Muscle strengthening is considered safe and beneficial for health during pregnancy. All adults should also do physical activity to improve muscle strength on at least 2 days a week. Being active makes you stronger so you can carry the weight of your growing baby. If you need to strain or grunt when lifting the object or task is too heavy.

Slow controlled activities can include climbing stairs, walking uphill, lifting or carrying shopping, yoga or similar core muscle strengthening activities, pelvic tilts exercises and pelvic floor exercises. Bending your knees rather than your back is important when lifting.

Exercises to avoid in pregnancy

• Anything where you need to lie flat on your back (especially after 16 weeks) as there is a risk of reducing blood flow and can cause dizziness and fainting.
• Extreme, dangerous or contact sports.
• Hot yoga should be avoided as there is a risk of exposure of the foetus to excessive heat.
Sitting less
Try and not sit for long periods at a time. So when you are watching TV, using the computer, reading or on your phone, on social media for example, make sure you get up and move around every so often, or take a break and come back to the activity later.

Relaxation
Remember whilst physical activity is important to your health and that of your baby it is also important to take some time in the day to relax and put your feet up. This would be a time for you to talk to your baby and take time out for yourself.
Returning to activity after birth

The type of birth will dictate when women will be able to return to moderate intensity physical activity. As a general rule 6-8 weeks following caesarean section. Generally walking, stretching and pelvic floor exercises can commence immediately after birth for normal vaginal delivery with no complications, but this will be dependent on the individual circumstances and advice should be sought from the midwife and/or physiotherapist.

For physical activity ideas and information see

www.activescotland.org.uk/

For local information on outdoor opportunities and leisure and sport activities:
www.dumgal.gov.uk/countrysideaccess
www.dumgal.gov.uk/leisure

Find a led health walk in your area
www.pathsforall.org.uk

For examples of exercises in pregnancy: