BASIC INFORMATION

GENERAL INFORMATION

• Exercising during pregnancy can help minimize minor discomfort associated with the pregnancy, improve posture, make the body more supple, enhance circulation, assist with control of relaxation and/or expulsion during delivery, and provide a feeling of general well-being. Pregnancy is a state of health, not of illness. Properly executed exercises can help maintain health and avoid problems. A well-conditioned body will perform better and more reliably during the stress of advanced pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Preconditioning will contribute to a more speedy recovery of body contour following delivery.

• Exercise regularly, rather than occasionally. Plan your exercise program with the help of your prenatal medical team. It should be planned around your prepregnancy fitness level. Women who have normally engaged in an exercise program before pregnancy can continue it during pregnancy (sometimes modifications are necessary). Women who were not exercising prior to pregnancy are advised to begin an exercise program.

• Limits to your exercise program will depend on your underlying health, whether you have had any complications with prior pregnancies, what types of exercise activities you plan, and your dietary needs.

CHARACTERISTIC CHANGES DURING PREGNANCY

• The pregnant woman's center of gravity moves forward and downward, altering balance, stability, and stance. Backache, a frequent complaint of pregnancy, is directly attributable to poor posture.

• Hormonal changes during pregnancy soften ligaments and connective tissue that can compromise the stability and support of the spine and torso. Proper alignment prevents strain on joints.

• The abdominal muscles are stressed by the weight of the enlarging uterus. Keeping the pelvis in proper position protects these muscles from undue stretching and possible separation.

• Proper posture and alignment will assist with better lung expansion and air exchange, which may become limited by the enlarging uterus.

POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS TO LOOK FOR IN AN EXERCISE PROGRAM

• Basically, what is needed is a warm-up period that slowly stretches muscles until the limit of range of motion is achieved and circulation to muscles and heart rate are gradually increased.

• Twenty minutes is considered a minimum time for the exercises to be effective. Exercising beyond 30 minutes probably provides no additional benefit.

• After exercising, there should be a cooling-down period for muscles and heart rate to return to their pre-exercise state. An exercise routine with the more stressful ones in the middle helps achieve this goal.

• Exercises should stress control, rhythm, stabilization of the pelvis, and proper alignment of the pelvis in a posterior-tilt position.

• Swimming provides rhythm, controlled breathing, and water buoyancy. In the late second trimester and in the third trimester, pool exercise is well tolerated. Wear a good supportive bathing suit.

• Drink plenty of fluids before and after you exercise.

CAUTIONS

• Do not participate in a strenuous exercise program (such as running a marathon) when pregnant, if you were not doing it regularly prior to pregnancy.

• Do not indulge in rapid exercises with uncontrolled momentum. Sudden or exaggerated motions will severely stress ligaments and joints that are already relaxed under hormonal influence.

• Contact sports or extreme sports should be avoided.

• Do not consider any exercises that increase the lordotic (lower back) curve of the spine or cause excessive compression of the uterus.

• Don't exercise outdoors in hot, humid weather.

• Don't bend deeply or greatly extend your joints and don't stand up abruptly.

• Stop any exercise right away if you develop signs of dizziness, bleeding, faintness, abdominal or back pain, overly rapid heart rate or shortness of breath. If symptoms continue, call our office.

• Discuss your participation in an exercise program with your obstetric provider to ensure that there are no factors that would cause problems. This is especially important if you have any chronic medical disorder or the pregnancy is considered high-risk.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

• You or a family member is pregnant and has questions or concerns about exercising.

• During pregnancy, you want to start a new exercise program or change an existing routine.

• You experience vaginal bleeding or spotting, abdominal cramping, absence of fetal movement or prolonged contractions, light-headedness or dizziness, serious headache, shortness of breath, palpitations, fast resting heart rate and chest pain.

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