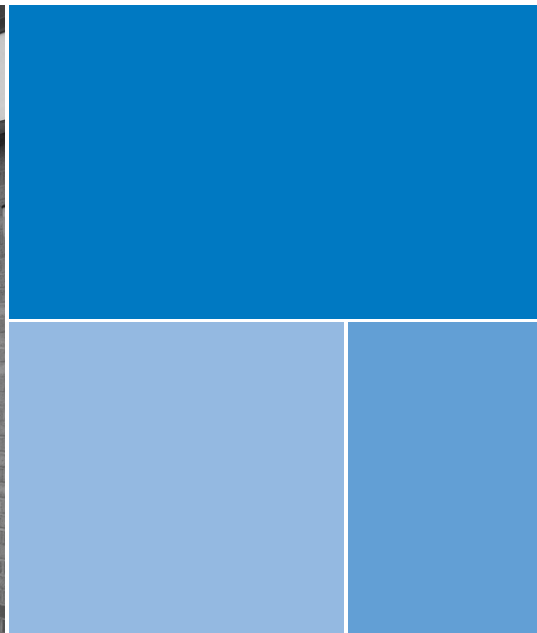




**James Paget  
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# Fit for pregnancy advice leaflet Women and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team



**Patient Information**

This booklet is here to guide you through how to lead an active and healthy pregnancy, and provide you with advice and top tips to help prevent problems such as back pain or pelvic girdle pain during your pregnancy.

Further information about your local Physiotherapy Team is provided under the 'extra help' section.

## Keeping active during pregnancy

If you are having a healthy pregnancy and your doctor or midwife have not told you to avoid exercise, it is safe and advisable to continue or start exercising at this time. Also consider healthier lifestyle changes during your pregnancy.

There are many benefits for both you and your unborn baby to being physically active in your pregnancy with minimal to no risk.

Physical activity does not increase your risk of:

- miscarriage,
- low birth weight,
- preterm delivery.

However, it is important to discuss exercise with members of your health care team during your early pregnancy visits. If your health care professional says you are safe to exercise, you can decide on an exercise routine that fits your needs and is safe during pregnancy.

## What are the benefits of keeping active and exercising in pregnancy?

- Helps you cope with pregnancy and labour better
- Decreases your risk of gestational diabetes, pre eclampsia and caesarean delivery
- Promotes healthy weight gain during pregnancy
- Recover quicker after birth
- Improves cardiovascular fitness
- Manages anxiety, stress and improves mood
- Improves sleep
- Manages constipation
- Reduces back pain / pelvic girdle pain.

## How much should I exercise during pregnancy?

It is recommended for pregnant women to participate in 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week. This can be performed in as little as 10 minute bouts.

Two sessions per week should include strengthening activities involving all major muscle groups.

Moderate intensity can be defined as activity that makes you breather faster but still able to hold a conversation.

# Physical activity for pregnant women



Helps to control weight gain



Helps reduce high blood pressure problems



Helps to prevent diabetes of pregnancy



Improves fitness



Improves sleep



Improves mood

**Not active?**

Start gradually

**Already active?**

Keep going



Do **muscle strengthening** activities twice a week

**Every activity counts**, in bouts of at least 10 minutes

**No evidence of harm**

**Listen to your body and adapt**



**Don't bump the bump**

## Advice to pregnant women who are not used to exercising

Pregnancy is an ideal time to adopt a more healthy and active lifestyle with the increased motivation of good health for you and your baby.

Begin with 10 minute sessions of moderate intensity, continuous exercise, gradually building to doing 30 minute continuous exercise daily, and 150 minutes per week in total.

Every activity counts.

When you exercise you should be able to pass the 'talk test'. This means that you can have a conversation whilst you exercise.

## Advice to pregnant women who are already exercising

Pregnant women who are already physically active should continue to maintain their physical exercise levels. However some may need to adapt the type of activity they do throughout pregnancy. Please refer to the section below discussing certain activities not recommended in pregnancy.

## Activities and exercise NOT recommended for pregnant women

- **Those with an increased risk of trauma:** including a higher risk of falling or high impact injuries such as skiing, water skiing, surfing, off-road cycling, gymnastics, horse riding, and contact sports such as netball, football, rugby
- **Activities that can put your body under physiological strain:** Scuba diving, sky diving or vigorous exercise above 6000 feet.
- **Activities involving lying in the supine position after the first trimester:** When you lie on your back, your uterus presses on a large vein that returns blood to the heart which can compromise blood flow to you and your baby.

Choosing low impact activity such as walking, swimming, Pilates, yoga or an exercise bike may be more comfortable than high impact exercise such as those involving jerky bouncing movements.

## What precautions should I take when exercising in pregnancy?

- Drink plenty of water before, during and after
- Wear a supportive bra to protect your breasts, back and shoulders
- Avoid becoming overheated especially in the first trimester. Drink plenty of water and wear loose clothing.
- Avoid standing still for too long, as this can cause swelling in the feet and legs.
- If you have any pregnancy-related problems please speak to your doctor, midwife or physiotherapist before starting exercise. If you feel unwell, don't start the session.
- Remember that your joints are not so well supported in pregnancy. This means that you are more at risk of over stretching.

## General Activity

If you think that you don't have time to exercise regularly, think again.

If you use the bus, try getting off a stop early and walk the rest of the way.

If you use the lift at work, try using the stairs instead.

When you are standing for a period of time, try marching on the spot.

Use your deep tummy and pelvic floor muscles for everyday activities.

These are all ways that you can fit exercises into your daily routine.

## Lifting

You should avoid heavy lifting.

Whatever you are lifting or carrying you should always:

- Bend your knees
- Tighten your pelvic floor and deep tummy muscles
- Bring the weight close to your body
- Use your thigh muscles to stand up
- Never lift when bending or twisting to the side.

## Posture

Many women get backache during their pregnancy. This is often due to postural and hormonal changes. It is important that you think about your posture at all times, especially around the home and at work.

### Standing

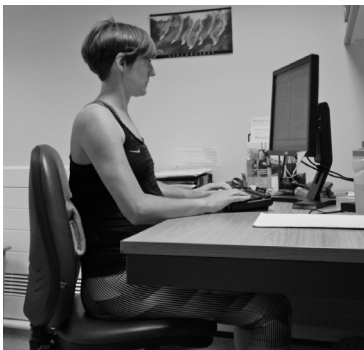
Your posture changes because of the softening of the ligaments, which help to support your spine and pelvis, the position of your baby and the extra weight.

Always try to stand and walk tall.

Use your deep tummy muscles to give you more support.

Tuck your tummy and bottom in.

### Sitting



When you sit down you flatten the curve in the low part of your back. This can give you backache.

Always try to sit with your bottom at the back of the seat.

Use a small cushion or rolled-up towel in the small of your back to give you more support. Always try to sit tall.

## Sleeping

Avoid sleeping on your back after the first trimester.

Sleep on your sides, ideally the left hand side.

Use extra pillows to give more support under your bump or between your legs.

Try rolling onto your side to get in and out of bed.



## What exercise can I do if I am experiencing backache?

The following exercises help to prevent and relieve backache. They also work your tummy muscles and this helps your posture.

If you are in any discomfort or have any concerns about how to perform these exercises, please talk to a healthcare professional first. These are provided as a guide and do not replace assessment by a qualified health professional if you are suffering with any symptoms.



## The deep tummy exercise

You can do this exercise in any position.



Put your hands underneath your bump.

Breathe gently in, and then as you breathe out, slowly draw in your lower tummy away from the palms of your hands.

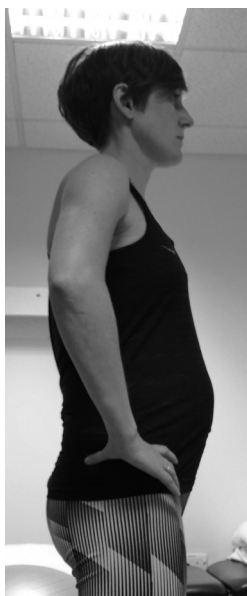
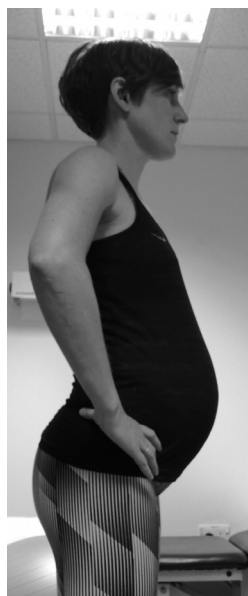
Breathe normally and try to hold this position for a few seconds then relax. Repeat several times.

As the muscles strengthen you can build up to a 10 second hold, repeated 10 times, several times each day.

You may find it easier to work these muscles if you tighten your pelvic floor muscles at the same time (see page 15). Try not to squeeze your legs or buttocks together.

Use these tummy and pelvic floor muscles in everyday activities such as during coughing or lifting a shopping bag.

## Pelvic tilting



Stand tall with your feet shoulder-width apart. Draw your tummy in and tilt your pelvis, imagining you are tucking your tailbone under.

It should feel like you are standing against a wall and flattening the small of your back into the wall.

Hold this position for a few seconds and let go gently. Repeat several times.

## Cat and Cow stretch



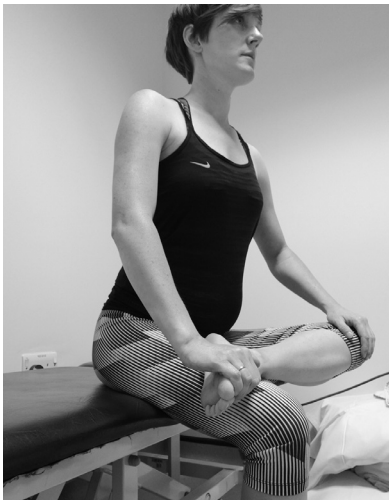
Start on your hands and knees, with legs and arms hip width apart.

Tuck your chin to your chest, lift your bump in towards you whilst tucking your 'tail' between your legs. Try to curl your spine as far as is comfortable.

Then slowly lower your spine down to the start position making sure you don't stick your bottom out too much.

Repeat 5-10 times.

## Hip Stretch



Start sitting up tall, cross one ankle over the other knee. Lean gently forwards from the hips keeping a tall posture. You should feel a lengthening in the hip area. Hold this for 10-20 seconds. Return to the start position and repeat on the other side.

## Squat

Keeping the gluteal muscles strong during pregnancy is very important to help support your hips and back. Practicing a correct squat can help with this but also keep you comfortable at standing up from a chair or the floor.

Start with your feet at least hip width apart.

Keep your eyes forward as you bend your knees and hips together.

Keep your bodyweight over your heels imagining you are going to sit in a chair that is placed behind you.

Then squeeze the buttock muscles to stand up tall again.

If this feels challenging you can always start with having a chair behind for support until you get better.

Start with practicing 3-5 repetitions, progressing to 12.



The following tips may also help with day to day activities:

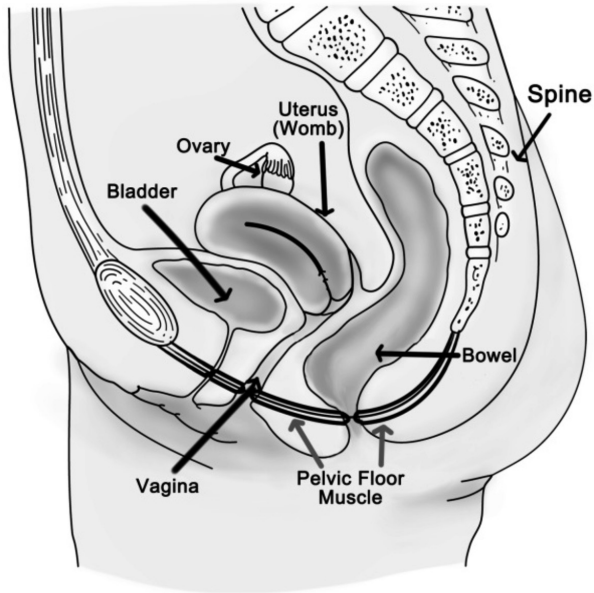
- When standing take the weight evenly through both feet.
- Roll over in bed with your knees bent and together.
- Get into the car by sitting on the seat first and then bring both legs in together.
- Try not to carry things on one side, especially a child on one hip.
- When shopping, carry evenly weighted bags in each hand
- Where possible, sit rather than stand to perform daily tasks such as preparing dinner.
- Don't stoop.
- Use a work surface which is level with your waist.
- Avoid repetitive bending and twisting.
- Think about your back when are buying equipment for your baby e.g. pram, car seat, cot.

If you have problems with your pelvic joints or back it may be helpful to see a physiotherapist – please see the 'extra help' section of the leaflet for more information about how to self-refer.

## What are my pelvic floor muscles and why are they so important?

It is normal for your bladder to work differently during pregnancy. You may find that you go to the toilet more often and get less warning. We call this frequency and urgency. It is also very common to get urine leakage during pregnancy. This often happens when you cough, sneeze or move suddenly.

One of the best things you can do to help is pelvic floor muscle exercises. This will be one of the most important exercises you will ever learn.



The pelvic floor muscles help to control your bladder and bowels. They also give support and help to prevent problems such as prolapse, which is descent of one or more of the vaginal walls, or the womb. A prolapse will create a bulge in the vagina. These muscles are stretched and weakened during pregnancy and delivery. It is essential that you strengthen them to prevent leakage of urine and improve vaginal sensation.

The exercise can be done in any position. To do this close and draw up the back passage, then close and draw up the vagina and front passage. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and urine at the same time. Hold tight for as many seconds as you can. You should feel a “squeeze and lift”. Try not to squeeze your legs or buttocks together or hold your breath.

**Goal:** 10 second squeeze, repeated 10 times in a row, followed by 10 short squeezes. Repeat your programme three times each day.

## Extra Help

Physiotherapy can help many pregnancy-related problems such as:

- Persistent pain in your back, pelvis, pubic bone or tummy
- Weakness of your tummy muscles
- Carpal tunnel syndrome ('pins and needles' or numbness in the hand).

Please speak to your midwife or GP if you are experiencing any of the problems listed above. Your midwife can provide you with contact information about Physio Direct, a self-referral service that allows you to be seen by your local physiotherapy department. Please ensure you advise the Physio Direct receptionist when calling to book the appointment that you are pregnant. This will ensure you are seen as early as possible.

If you experience any problems such as pelvic floor weakness, or any problems with bladder and/or bowel control, please ask your midwife or doctor to refer you to the Women and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team.

If you have any questions about the information provided in this leaflet, please contact the Women and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team on 01493 452378.

We hope that you have found this information booklet useful.

## Resources

For 'Exercise in pregnancy' tips and advice visit:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pregnancy-exercise/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pregnancy-exercise/)

For pre and postnatal yoga video visit:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/prenatal-and-postnatal-exercise/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/prenatal-and-postnatal-exercise/)

Baby Buddy App: An App for parents and parents-to-be endorsed by the Department of Health

## Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

### Trust Values

#### Courtesy and respect

- A welcoming and positive attitude
- Polite, friendly and interested in people
- Value and respect people as individuals  
So people feel **welcome**

#### Attentively kind and helpful

- Look out for dignity, privacy & humanity
- Attentive, responsive & take time to help
- Visible presence of staff to provide care  
So people feel **cared for**

#### Responsive communication

- Listen to people & answer their questions
- Keep people clearly informed
- Involve people  
So people feel **in control**

#### Effective and professional

- Safe, knowledgeable and reassuring
- Effective care / services from joined up teams
- Organised and timely, looking to improve  
So people feel **safe**



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240

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