

Stretching During Pregnancy

Maintaining flexibility during pregnancy can help prevent/ease discomfort as your body changes. The increase in your body weight as your baby grows, and the changes in how you carry that weight in order to maintain your balance (and stop you from toppling over!!) can cause your muscles to work slightly differently, and add increased pressure to your joints.

Stretching can help avoid muscles and joint stiffness from resulting postural changes and altered body mechanics.

Stretching can also help relax tired muscles, helping you get a good night's sleep.

Like all things during pregnancy, there are some dos and don'ts of stretching. The hormone relaxin which is present during pregnancy (it helps the uterus to expand) has a loosening effect on all ligaments and therefore means you are at an increased risk of injuring yourself if you don't take care.

The following are **guidelines for stretching during pregnancy**:

- Avoid excessive stretching
- Avoid ballistic/bounce stretches
- Avoid any movements which require you to be flat on your back (especially in your 3rd trimester) This position decreases the blood flow to your uterus.
- Move slowly
- Hold each stretch for 15-30 seconds
- Breathe deeply
- Avoid extreme ranges of joint motion
- Avoid positions that cause your abdomen to stretch too much

Here are a few ideal stretches to get you started:

1. Quadriceps Stretch Side lying:

Lie on your right side.

Rest your head on a pillow making sure your neck is supported (you may need to use two pillows)

Keep your body in a straight line

Bend your left knee, bringing your left heel up toward your buttock. Using your left hand, grab your left ankle.

Keep your thighs together and knees in line as you gently pull your heel to your buttock. Don't overstretch

Hold 15-30 seconds. Breathe deeply. Repeat 2-3 times each leg.

2. Cat Stretch:

Start on hands and knees.

Palms flat on the ground.

Hands directly below shoulders.

Knees directly below hips.

Keep your neck straight, eyes looking toward the floor.

Tuck your lower abdominals in toward your spine.

Round your back, tucking your buttocks under and arching your spine toward the ceiling.

Hold 15-30 seconds. Breathe deeply. Return to start position. Repeat 2-3 times.

3. Calf Stretch:

Stand facing the wall. (About arm's length away)

Place your hands on the wall in front of you, palms flat, arms out straight.

Step back with your right foot and place it foot flat on the ground.

With both feet flat, bend your left knee towards the wall keeping your right leg straight.

Keep your head up and shoulders relaxed.

Hold for 15-30 seconds. Breathe deeply. Repeat 2-3 times each leg.

4. Child's Pose:

Start on hands and knees.

Palms flat on the ground.

Hands directly below shoulders.
Knees directly below hips.

Slowly lower your buttocks toward your heels, arms remain extended out in front of you.

Your head and arms should relax down towards the floor. Lengthen through your spine as you stretch your buttocks toward your heels.

Hold for 15-30 seconds. Breathe deeply. Repeat 2-3 times.

Yoga is an excellent means of maintaining flexibility as well as helping with breathing and relaxation. Specialised yoga for pregnancy classes are ideal, but if you don't have access to these and you already have a yoga background, then follow the guidelines mentioned, and tell the instructor you are pregnant.

Bikram Yoga (Yoga practised in a heated room) should be avoided due to the risk of overheating.

Pilates is also a popular form of exercise to do during pregnancy. Pilates is very adaptable and the exercises and stretches can be easily modified as your body changes. Look for pilates for pregnancy classes or seek out an instructor who has experience in pilates for pregnancy.

And remember.....Pregnancy doesn't have to be a time of confinement and inactivity. Provided your pregnancy is uncomplicated and you follow the guidelines women can exercise well in to their third trimester of pregnancy.

Happy stretching!!

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