

Coping with Stress

Even though pregnancy is an exciting time for a woman, it is also a time of great change to her body, her emotions, and her family. Sometimes these changes can add new stress for an already busy pregnant woman.

It's important to take control of stress during pregnancy because:

- Recent studies suggest that high levels of stress may increase the risk of preterm labor, low birth weight and, possibly, miscarriage.
- Unrelieved stress may make a woman more vulnerable to illness that, in turn, can endanger the fetus.
- Women who react to stress by smoking, drinking, or taking drugs increase the risk of having a baby with low birth weight or birth defects.

To reduce stress, a pregnant woman can:

- Get regular exercise.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Take a nap.
- Identify causes of stress, then try to eliminate the causes.
- Cut back on unnecessary activities.
- Get professional counseling.
- Ask partners, family and friends for emotional support.
- Attend peer support groups.
- Get help with housework.
- Recognize that hormonal mood swings are normal.
- Use relaxation techniques such as a deep breathing routine.
- Talk with supervisors, if stress is work related.
- Focus on the beauty of pregnancy and the miracle of birth.
- Plan recreational activities.

Fitness in Pregnancy

Regular exercise helps keep pregnant women fit. It's good for their hearts, minds, and entire bodies. Exercise frequency, duration and intensity during pregnancy should be based upon a woman's pre-pregnancy exercise patterns. A pregnant woman will get the best benefit if she exercises more than three times a week. The best exercise plan is to try to get 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise every day— even if it is done in 10 minute increments throughout the day.

Examples of moderate exercise are:

Walking Swimming Housework Gardening

The Do's of exercise during pregnancy:

- Consult your physician before beginning an exercise program.
- Keep your heart rate under 140 beats per minute.
- Choose activities that increase fitness and stamina.
- Start gently and gradually, especially if you haven't exercised before.
- Stop exercising when you feel fatigued.
- Drink plenty of fluids before and during exercise, and wear breathable clothing.
- Take time to stretch before and after exercise to increase your strength and flexibility.
- Eat enough calories to make up for the calories you're burning while exercising.

The Don'ts of pregnancy:

- Choose activities that involve jumping or that put stress on joints, like high-impact aerobics or jogging.
- Let yourself overheat during exercise.
- Use saunas or whirlpools.

Keeping Healthy

Go to all your prenatal care appointments with your health care provider.

Prenatal care is the medical care you get when you're pregnant. It helps you and your health care provider track your pregnancy and identify potential problems before they become serious for you or your baby.

Be sure to have all the tests and counseling recommended by your health care provider.

Routine blood and urine tests help monitor your pregnancy. Genetic testing may be recommended if you are at high risk of having a baby with a genetic or inherited disease.

- **The best thing for you and your baby is to:**

Eat a healthy diet.

Take your prenatal vitamin every day.

Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day.

Exercise three times a week or more
(with your health care provider's approval).

Try to minimize stress.

Try to make time every day to rest.

Stop drinking all types of alcohol.

Quit smoking.

Stop using street drugs.

Check with your health care provider before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medication.

Dental Care

Good oral hygiene is an important part of staying healthy. A woman should continue to brush and floss her teeth at least twice a day, while pregnant. In addition, a woman should see her dentist for a regular check up at least once during pregnancy.

It is not unusual for a pregnant woman to experience bleeding gums after brushing her teeth. Gingivitis, an inflammation of the gums, may occur or worsen during pregnancy due to hormonal changes. Women who suffer from gingivitis in pregnancy will be especially prone to bleeding gums and infection. If a pregnant woman ignores the problem or does not properly clean her teeth, it may worsen.

Some studies have associated gum disease (periodontitis) with increased risk for preterm labor—another reason for good oral hygiene and dental visits during pregnancy.

Kegel Exercises

Kegel exercises are also known as pelvic floor exercises. They are simple techniques for toning the muscles of a woman's vaginal and perineal area. The pelvic floor refers to the muscular tissues in a woman's body that help support the uterus.

Kegel exercises help to:

- Support the weight of the womb.
- Reduce stress incontinence (urine leakage).
- Prevent tearing of the woman's perineal area during delivery.
- Make postpartum recovery easier

How to perform Kegel exercises

- Firmly tense the muscles around her vagina and anus for about 10 seconds, as if trying to stop the flow of urine, then relax.
- Repeat 3-5 times.
- Kegel exercises can be performed anywhere— in the car, at work, in the movies, while standing, etc.
- Begin performing Kegel exercises as soon as you learn you are pregnant.
- Continue to perform Kegel exercises through pregnancy and during post partum period.

Prenatal Care Coordination

Keeping Healthy

