Safe Exercises During Pregnancy

So you’re pregnant—Congrats!

If it’s your first time, you’re probably experiencing a whirlwind of emotions as you try to figure out what you should and should not do. When it comes to exercising, you’ve likely already heard about the great benefits pregnant women can reap, such as increased energy levels, better sleep, and reduced pregnancy discomfort, but it can be tricky to determine what is and isn’t safe.

“Healthy women having uncomplicated pregnancies should exercise throughout pregnancy,” said Dr. Alice Roberts, an OB/GYN doctor at Abington OB/GYN Associates. “It is recommended that women should exercise for 150 minutes per week at a moderate level.” A moderate level means that while you should aim to increase your heart and respiratory rate, you should still be able to have a conversation without a problem.

And if you were an athlete prior to pregnancy? Dr. Roberts says you should still follow these guidelines. Maintain your previous exercise regime, but avoid anything that can cause trauma to your abdomen. Despite what many popular pregnancy books say, there is no maximum heart rate to avoid while exercising. As long as you can carry on a conversation and are feeling fine during exercise, keep going! While experienced runners can continue their workouts during pregnancy, running distances greater than 5-6 miles at a time is imprudent; this is not the time to run a marathon!

So what are the best exercises for pregnant women?

First and foremost, walking is one of the best cardiovascular workouts a pregnant woman can do. It’s easy on your joints, you can do it anywhere, and no equipment is required—aside from good workout clothes and a pair of supportive shoes. It’s also allowed during all three trimesters, unless your doctor advises otherwise.

Another great exercise is swimming, which is ideal because it exercises both your arms and legs, provides cardiovascular benefits, and allows women to feel weightless, even with the extra baby weight.

Resistance exercise and weight training are also good ways to stay fit if using light weights (less than 35 lbs.). To ensure you’re getting a good workout, you may increase your repetitions but not the weight, and of course, always use proper technique when lifting. However, it’s important to be safe. “Women should avoid lying flat on their back after the first trimester and certainly in the second half of pregnancy,” said Dr. Roberts.

Expectant moms can also benefit from stretching and prenatal yoga, which can help maintain muscle tone and flexibility. If you do, be sure to complement it with a cardio activity a
few times a week to get your heart going. Or try dancing or low-impact aerobics, which are great cardiovascular exercises that tone your body.

If you never exercised prior to pregnancy, don’t worry. Dr. Roberts says you can start with 15 minutes of walking daily and work up to 30 minutes.

When exercising, be sure to get approval and safety tips from your physician. Keep a water bottle near you at all times so you can stay well hydrated. Additionally, be sure to wear comfortable clothing exercising, such as sweatpants and a comfortable top.

As far as exercises you should avoid at all costs, Dr. Roberts says not to do exercises that increase the risk of falling or abdominal trauma. Some of these activities include bicycling, contact sports, skiing, ice skating or horseback riding.

And if you experience symptoms such as vaginal bleeding, shortness of breath, dizziness, or chest pain, stop exercising immediately and call your physician.

For more information about Abington OB/GYN Associates or to make an appointment with Dr. Roberts, call 215-657-8430 or visit www.abingtonhealth.org/aoga.