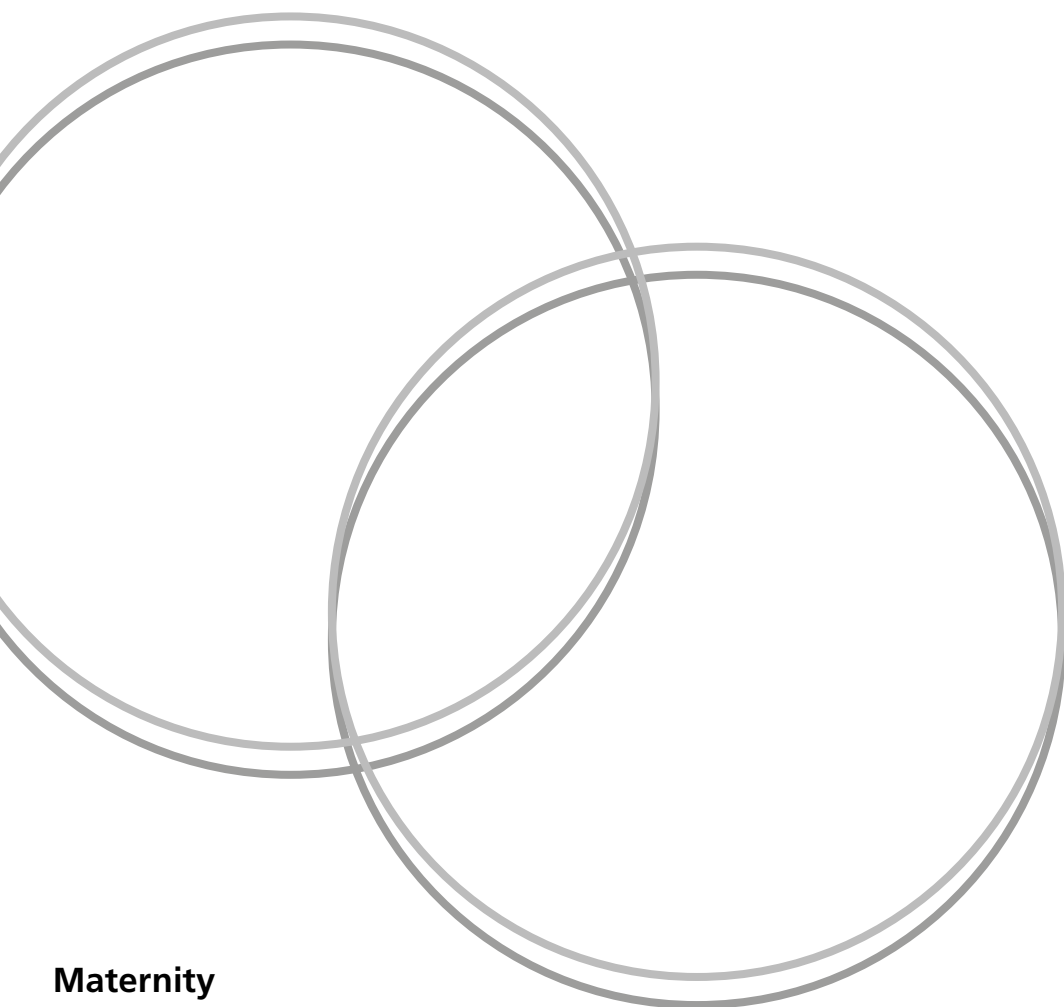


# Physical Activity throughout Pregnancy

Information leaflet



Pregnancy is a great opportunity to make positive changes to your lifestyle. Many women choose this time to stop smoking, reduce or avoid alcohol, and eat more healthily for their own wellbeing and their baby's development. It is also important to do some regular moderate physical activity. We understand that women can be uncertain or anxious about becoming more active during pregnancy. Being active will help you stay healthy and adapt as your body changes.

For most women, being more active during pregnancy is safe and beneficial. Only a small number of women are advised not to increase their activity levels due to specific medical conditions or complications. If you have been diagnosed with a complication during your pregnancy or have any other concerns about exercising safely, it's important to speak with your midwife or medical team.

## How can being active help you during pregnancy?

Being physically active:

- improves the fitness of your heart and lungs, which need to work harder when you are pregnant
- helps prevent unnecessary weight gain during pregnancy
- reduces the chance of blood pressure problems
- makes you less likely to develop gestational diabetes (diabetes related to pregnancy). If you do have diabetes during your pregnancy, being more active can help to control your blood sugars.
- improves your mood, reduces stress and helps prevent or treat depression and anxiety
- helps you get a better night's sleep and have more energy
- is a good way to spend time with friends and family, which is important for a healthy and happy lifestyle.

**Most importantly, there is no evidence that doing moderate physical activity causes any harm to you or your baby.**

## Every Activity Counts

What is physical activity and what counts as moderate? Anything that makes you breathe faster whilst still being able to hold a conversation would be classed as moderate activity.

Activity doesn't have to be strenuous to be good for you and doesn't have to be in a gym or exercise class to count. Every bit of movement helps.

### **It can include:**

- swimming
- housework/gardening
- dancing/running around with children
- jogging
- pilates / yoga (avoid hot yoga)
- brisk walking (walking the dog/walking the children to school)
- cycling
- taking the stairs

## Not active? Start gradually

### **I'm new to physical activity. How should I start?**

This is the ideal time for you to begin, but start gradually. Any activity is better than none, even small amounts. Start small and build up according to how you feel. You may need to adapt as your pregnancy progresses and your bump gets bigger.

If you are new to being physically active, avoid intense or strenuous activities and lifting heavy weights.

Find something you enjoy, as this will help you stick with it. Brisk walking is a great way to get more active during pregnancy. You don't need any special clothing or equipment and can build it into your daily routine. Here are some more ideas:

- walking to the shops rather than driving
- getting off the bus a stop earlier and walking the rest of the way
- walking the children to school
- taking a short walk at lunchtime or going for a gentle swim
- taking the stairs rather than the lift
- joining a pregnancy specific exercise class – this is a great way to meet people

As your fitness increases, aim to walk a little further and enjoy your activity for longer.

Online classes can be an accessible way of motivating yourself as you don't have to leave the house and you can exercise when your baby/other children are napping, or after they have gone to bed.

## **Already active? Keep going**

Can I carry on with my pre-pregnancy activities? Yes, if you are already active you should try to maintain your physical activity levels. However, you may need to adapt or change certain activities during your pregnancy to find what feels most comfortable and suitable for you. For example, replacing contact sports with non-contact sport or strenuous strength training with a body weight exercise class like yoga or pilates. Remember to find something you enjoy.

## **How much activity should I be doing?**

The recommended guidance is that adults should do 150 minutes of moderate activity per week. The advice for pregnant women is the same as for any adult. Although this might sound like a lot, it is important to remember:

- You don't have to achieve this level straight away; start gradually. Your levels can be built up over many weeks. Even a small increase in the amount of activity can make a big difference to your health.
- All activity counts. Some days you'll have a bit more time than others, so you can plan your activity into your week. You can break down activity into small chunks, and you will soon find it builds up during the week.

## **Listen to your body and adapt**

Whatever you choose to do, you'll need to listen to your body and adapt your activity as your pregnancy progresses. For example, if you were running earlier in your pregnancy, you might need to slow to a light jog or a brisk walk as the weeks go on. Swimming during pregnancy is safe and can help you to feel relaxed, lighter, and to move more easily. The buoyancy of the water is very supportive as your pregnancy progresses.

## **Don't bump the bump**

### **What should I avoid?**

- Avoid contact sports such as rugby or martial arts even if you were doing these before becoming pregnant.
- Activities such as skiing, horse riding, and off-road cycling carry a higher risk of falls and injury. Some women may choose to continue these in early pregnancy if they are experienced and confident; however, it is important to carefully consider the risks, particularly as your pregnancy progresses.
- You should avoid scuba diving or exercising at an altitude (height) of over 2,000 metres.
- Avoid overheating and very vigorous activity. It is not recommended to exercise for more than 45 minutes, especially in hot, humid conditions.
- Avoid lying flat on your back as your pregnancy progresses. This position can put pressure on major blood vessels and reduce blood flow to your heart and baby. Adapt your position during exercise classes if needed, the instructor should be able to offer safe alternatives to keep you comfortable
- Be aware that pregnancy can affect your balance and you have a higher chance of falling over, so you might need additional support while stretching or doing balance type activities.

## Do I need any special equipment?

No. It is important to stay cool, and to wear loose and comfortable clothing. Keep well hydrated and remember to carry water with you. As your breasts grow, a well-fitted, supportive bra can make physical activity much more comfortable.

If you go to classes, make sure your instructor knows that you are pregnant.

## When should I stop exercising?

If it feels good, keep going – if it is uncomfortable, stop and get advice.

If an activity is uncomfortable, slow down or take a break and see if you feel better. If you don't, stop the activity and get medical advice. This is especially important if you notice that you're very breathless without any activity or with minimal activity, or you have chest pains, severe headaches, dizziness, muscle weakness, calf swelling or pain. If you experience any of these symptoms, immediately contact the **Maternity Assessment Unit** on **01865 220221**.

You should also contact the Maternity Assessment Unit if you have any vaginal bleeding, think your waters have broken, experience contractions or your baby's movements are reduced.

If you have a medical condition or you are diagnosed with any complications during your pregnancy, you should check with your doctor or midwife that it's safe to keep doing your current activities. However, for most medical conditions, light/moderate intensity activity is safe and encouraged.

## How to keep motivated

Staying motivated to keep active during pregnancy can be challenging, especially in the early and later stages. Here are some tips:

- Try to find local activities that you enjoy (your community midwife may be able to provide a list of local activities that are recommended).
- Build activity into your daily routine.
- Set small, realistic goals – even 10-minute sessions count.
- Share activity with friends and family.
- Track and record your activities using an activity device/pedometer – you will be surprised how much you are already doing.
- Remember that it is normal to have days when you feel less motivated!

## **Further information**

### **Here for Health – Health Improvement Advice Centre**

Oxford University Hospital drop-in centre for advice and support on healthy living, including physical activity, diet, smoking, alcohol and emotional wellbeing.

Tel: 01865 221 429

(Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm)

Email: [\*\*hereforhealth@ouh.nhs.uk\*\*](mailto:hereforhealth@ouh.nhs.uk)

Website: [\*\*www.ouh.nhs.uk/HereforHealth\*\*](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/HereforHealth)

### **Department of Health (GOV.UK) information**

Website: [\*\*www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-infographics\*\*](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-infographics)

# 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**, every minute counts, more is better

**No evidence of harm**

**Listen to your body and adapt**



**Don't bump the bump**

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

*We would like to thank the Oxfordshire Maternity Voices Partnership for their contribution in the development of this leaflet.*

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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