

Everything You Need to Know About Getting Started with Prenatal Workouts

Pregnancy is a trying time. Apart from all the changes that your body is going through, from physical changes right down to hormonal changes, you're also going to be struggling to get used to the lifestyle changes that you're forced to adapt.

Keeping this in mind, it's no surprise that many people get so caught up in what they're going through, that they unknowingly change their lifestyles more than they should.

In no way is this more evident than in the area of exercise.

Naturally, this depends a lot on the type of person you are. Assuming you were the type that used to get a lot of exercise, then this is going to be a huge change to your lifestyle, but it is still one that commonly occurs.

However, if you were the type of person that was already fairly sedentary, then the change to a slightly more sedentary lifestyle can often go unnoticed.

Either way, as you're about to find out, slipping into a sedentary lifestyle, without much exercise, isn't a good thing. While it may seem tempting – resisting that temptation is really one of the best things that you can do!

Soon, you'll see why this is the case.

After that, this guide is going to give you everything you need to know to get started with your own prenatal workouts, so that you don't risk lapsing!

Without any delay, let's just jump straight into things, and introduce you to the ideas of prenatal workouts.

Introduction to Prenatal Workouts

By this point, it should go without saying that prenatal workouts are really just, as the name implies, any and all workouts that you carry out during a pregnancy, and before you give birth.

Sometimes, people even use the term to describe workouts that are carried out post-pregnancy, but this isn't the case at all. In fact, as you'll see soon, there is a distinct difference between the type of workouts we're discussing and the ones that would be carried out after pregnancy.

Largely, this is due to the fact that post-pregnancy, you're going to be able to gradually go back to a more 'regular' workout schedule.

However during your pregnancy, you'll instead find that you have various limitations as to what you can do. After all, you are carrying a child, and each and every workout that you undertake should take that into account.

So while you do want to be getting some exercise, you definitely don't want to push yourself too far, or do anything that might be bad for your unborn baby.

Of course, this begs a question, and that is, "Why would you want to be getting any exercise at all? Wouldn't it be safer to just wait until after you've delivered and then get back to a regular workout routine?"

Once again, this ties in with the importance of prenatal workouts, and it is a topic that we're going to discuss right now!

Important Role of Prenatal Workouts

Naturally, exercising keeps you fit. That much is something that you're probably intimately aware of, but you should understand that 'being fit' has a great importance to your pregnancy.

When you commit to a prenatal workout program, your main concern isn't going to be to stay trim, or tone up muscles, or even increase your stamina. Of course, these will all be benefits that you obtain anyway – but they aren't the focus that you're aiming for.

Instead, what you should be most concerned with are those related to your pregnancy itself!

In this, prenatal workouts really come to the fore because, if carried out properly, they can really increase your level of comfort during your pregnancy, and may even ease your experience during delivery.

Even after pregnancy, the benefits of exercising continue to manifest themselves, most notably by reducing your risk of undergoing postpartum depression.

Anyway, to give you a good idea of why you should definitely be starting to think about a prenatal workout program, here are some of the important benefits that you can expect to obtain if you do:

1. Greater flexibility and better blood circulation that will increase your comfort during pregnancy and ensure that you don't suffer from too many muscle aches.

2. Less water retention, stress, weight gains and tension will further reduce discomfort that many pregnant women face.
3. All stretch marks and varicose veins will appear minimally.
4. The risk of abdominal separation, where the abdominal muscles 'part' from each other due to the increase in the size of the belly, will be far less.
5. Calcium absorption will occur at an improved rate, helping ensure that both you and your child are getting the necessary quantities that are needed.
6. Stamina, fitness, and overall strength and muscle control will be very much enhanced.

See how important prenatal workouts are? Simply by spending a little time on a regular routine, you could end up finding that a lot of the common problems many women face during pregnancy are alleviated.

Overall, this will ease your way through your pregnancy, and help you to face it without suffering much at all!

And bear in mind, what we've discussed are, for the most part, just the physical advantages of prenatal workout programs.

By exercising regularly, you're going to be also promoting a feeling of well being, boosting your confidence, and helping yourself build a more positive self image. Let's face it, we all need this, especially during pregnancy when its so easy to become depressed at the changes that our bodies are going through.

Now that you know just how a regular workout program can help you, how about we start getting into the meat of this guide.

No – we're not going to go through the exact exercises that you could be carrying out just yet, because before we begin that it is important that you know where you should start, and what you should prepare beforehand...

Complete Preparation for Prenatal Workouts

Okay so before we begin this, let's establish one thing: You're pregnant yes, but that doesn't mean you're fragile. At the same time though, it does mean that your body is undergoing a lot of changes, and you are carrying another life within you – so you can't exactly be reckless about what you do either!

That's the key to prenatal exercise preparation really: Knowing what you can and can't do.

Within this section, you're going to find out about what preparatory steps, and safety measures, you should be undertaking so that your exercise doesn't end up being more of a bane than a benefit.

By knowing this, you can then exercise comfortably, knowing that you've covered all the bases, and that you should have few problems, if any!

Checklist Before You Begin Exercising

Although you might be all revved up and ready to get started immediately, before you even think about beginning to exercise, or really, plan a workout program, you need to ensure that you're completely safe.

While we'll, of course, be covering some of the safety precautions that you can take to minimize your risk of anything untoward happening, the first thing that you should do is ensure that you're not in the way of the more 'general' risks.

Bearing this in mind, you should definitely go over the following checklist to see if you fit into any of these categories:

1. Do you have diabetes of any kind?
2. Any high blood pressure problems at all?
3. Ever had any preexisting heart conditions?
4. Are you at risk of respiratory conditions?
5. Do you have a medical history of premature labor?
6. Have you experienced any physical condition that has prevented you from exercising in the past?

Needless to say, most of the questions on this checklist are pretty straightforward, so you should have no trouble answering them based on prior medical check ups.

If your answer to all of these questions was a firm 'no', then congratulations, you have little or nothing to worry about, and you should be able to just follow this guide with no issues whatsoever.

However, if your answer to any of the questions in the checklist was 'yes', or if you were unsure of the answer, then it is strongly advised that you consult a doctor before you start to plan your workout program.

No, that doesn't mean to say that you should stop reading now though.

Over the course of this guide, you'll find that you're able to perform most of the recommended exercises, unless you have a specific inhibition that prevents you from doing so. Still, it wouldn't hurt if, after you know the type of prenatal exercises that you can carry out, if you get a professional medical opinion.

Better safe than sorry, right? And end of the day, you want to ensure that you're not exposing yourself to any unnecessary risk!

With this initial checklist out of way, let's move on to some of the basic safety precautions that you should be taking during your prenatal exercise.

Safety Precautions for Prenatal Exercise

Remember the golden rule that we're going to be applying in this case: Know what you can and can't do.

Really, this is the key to safe and beneficial exercise during a pregnancy, and as you're about to see, a lot of the safety precautions that you can take revolve around knowing your limits and not going too far.

As you would expect, these limits can vary drastically from person to person, depending on how fit they were previously, and how much exercise they're used to, as well as other factors.

Seeing as there's no formula to follow, the truth of the matter is that no one can gauge your limits better than you yourself can, and so you need to learn to do so. Partly, what we're about to discuss will help you do just that!

1. Do not overwork your body

Number one on our list of precautions is really a simple and straightforward one. While at normal times, overworking your body is bad, during a pregnancy, it is even worse as there are so many changes within your body that need the extra energy.

Primarily, pay attention to your breathing. As you start to feel short of breath, it means that you're pushing your body a little too much.

During regular times, this can be done, but during a pregnancy, the minute you start to feel short of breath, you should scale back on whatever exercise you're doing.

Of course, there are other signs that you're overworking your body, including dizziness, nausea, fatigue, lightheadedness, and a 'chill' feeling. If you experience any of those, stop exercising, and take a break.

Should you continue to feel such symptoms, you might need to even seek medical advice.

2. Avoid rigorous bouncing

Any sort of exercise that involves a rigorous bouncing motion is definitely off the table during a pregnancy. Remember that when you're bouncing, your baby is going to be bouncing too, and that movement is something that you don't want to put him or her through!

3. Avoid exercises that can cause abdominal trauma

While some abdominal strengthening exercises are fine, anything that has the potential to cause trauma to your abdomen is definitely not. Steer clear of things that could potentially injure this delicate part of your body.

4. Maintain a correct and proper posture

Posture is something that is extremely important during prenatal exercises, and you should always ensure that your pelvis is tilted and your back, straight.

In line with this, you should also avoid exercises that can cause you to arch your back, because coupled with the additional weight that you're carrying in your belly, this could end up causing injuries.

Similarly, exercises that bring your feet to a level that is about your hips can be just as detrimental.

5. Start slowly

No matter what level of exercise you may be used to, your pregnancy has caused your circumstances to change, and you need to be willing to take that into account and gradually figure out just how far you can push yourself.

Start slowly, no matter how much you're used to strenuous exercise, and work your way back up!

6. Keep cool and hydrated

One thing that is very important is that you constantly ensure that you don't become overheated or dehydrated. Either of these can be detrimental to your unborn child, so you should take pains to ensure that it isn't a risk.

Avoid exercising in hot or humid weather, and be sure to drink lots of water at all times.

Also, wear light and breathable clothing that doesn't cling to your body and cause you to build up more heat than you should.

7. Avoid exercises performed on your back

Generally speaking, you should avoid all of these exercises after the first trimester, but avoiding them altogether is fine too.

If you do exercise on your back, you're opening yourself up to the risk of compressing an artery due to the additional weight of your baby, and this could end up restricting some vital blood flow.

8. Wear good shoes

Now you might not think this is important, but believe us – it is. Good pairs of exercise shoes can help provide more than just comfort, and can absorb impact, provide traction, and much needed support.

All of these things are going to be helpful to ensure that your movements aren't jarring to your child.

Based on these safety precautions, you should now have a very good idea of what you should be looking out for, and avoiding.

As you can well imagine, any activity that has the potential to cause injury, such as contact sports, or things like rollerblading where you might fall, are definitely also on the 'avoid' list that you've come up with.

Equally on that list are activities at high altitudes, where the air is thinner and you'll find that you'll be constantly short of breath.

Likewise, diving, and other related activities that could cause additional pressure on your body, are also out of the question.

Basically, if you think each exercise that you're considering doing through, you should be able to now determine whether or not it is okay for you to carry it out. If in doubt, you could always consult your own medical expert.

Anyway, we're off to a pretty good start now – and it's time that we delve deeper and look at actually getting started on a workout routine!

Getting Started with Exercise

Starting to exercise is something that can actually be pretty difficult for those who aren't used to it. Assuming you've been exercising regularly, you may find that a lot of what follows to be things that you already know – but it's worth going through this just in case there's something you missed.

Because of your current condition, it is all the more important that you have the foundations right.

Already, you know what you should avoid, and so that should give you a fairly good grounding to start off on. However, it isn't nearly good enough if you want to have effective, beneficial, and risk-free prenatal workout routines.

Some good rules to start off any prenatal exercise are as follow:

1. Be sure to wear loose fitting and light clothes that don't restrict you or cause your body to overheat.
2. Allow up to 2 hours after a meal before you start any workout.
3. Warm up.

Yes, most of these rules are fairly self explanatory, but it is the third one that we're most interested in: The warm up.

Without a doubt, warming up is an important and highly necessary part of any exercise routine, and if you're going to be carrying out prenatal exercise, you really must ensure that your body is ready for it!

Warming Up 101

Essentially, the purpose of a warm up is simple: It limbers up your body, gets your blood flowing, and by doing so ensures that your body is well prepared for whatever exercise you're planning to undertake.

Jumping straight in without making sure that your body is ready is a recipe for disaster.

If your muscles are tight and tense, you could end up injuring them, and if your blood isn't flowing well, then you could easily push yourself too far, too fast, and cause other complications.

In essence – you don't want any of this to happen.

So the solution is simple: Warm up well!

Bearing this in mind, let's walk you through some of the basics of a good warm up, so that you're fully able to carry it out yourself, and thus getting you one step closer to having a great prenatal workout.

Keep in mind that your warm up is, really, part of your workout itself, and it should be carried out right at the start of every exercise program!

About 5 to 10 minutes of warming up is ideal. During that time, the bulk of it should be spent on stretching your various muscle groups. Naturally, the inclination may be to focus on the big muscle groups, and the ones that your workout is going to use most – but really, you should try to encompass as many muscles as possible.

One way to go about stretching effectively is to start at the top and work your way down.

What this means is that you should start with your neck muscles, then go on to your shoulders, upper arms, chest, lower arms, torso, back, and waist. Various stretches could help you to stretch each of these muscles, so you should have no problem finding one that works for each, or multiple muscles at once.

After that, head further down to your groin, hamstring, upper legs, and calves as well as ankles.

As you can see, that's quite a lot of stretching, but each stretch that you perform is going to increase the benefits that you obtain. In short – you're going to be all the better for it in the long run.

When you are actually stretching, a common mistake that many people make is to stretch until they feel a slight pain. Frankly, this 'no pain, no gain' logic is faulty, and you should never push yourself far enough that it actually hurts you.

Instead, gauge your limit, and be sure to stretch – but not overstretch. Overstretching to the point where it is painful can actually cause muscle tears, which are the last things that you want during a pregnancy!

Also, when you're stretching you should be doing so in slow and measured motions. Don't 'bounce' or 'jerk' your motion – that would defeat the whole point.

For ideas of the exact stretches that you should be using, just refer to the many online and offline resources on the topic.

Some people tend to include a quick, slow paced cardiovascular exercise in their warm up stage, just to get the blood flowing. This isn't entirely necessary, but it isn't harmful either, and could help bridge the gap between your warm up stage and your workout proper.

End of the day, it is largely a question of preference.

Now that we've covered the warm up and preparation for your workout, let's really sink our teeth into things, and start discussing your actual prenatal workout!

Types of Prenatal Workouts

Normal workouts come in so many different shapes and sizes, so to speak anyway.

While you may have already gathered that, due to the limitations and long list of things that you should avoid, there are severely less options that you'll face – there are still quite a number that you can choose from.

Although the limitations rule out things like, well, rugby and other contact sports, as well as diving, rollerblading, and anything that could result in injury, this still leaves ample other choices from which you can pick what you prefer.

Roughly speaking though, if you like, you could divide the types of prenatal workouts into two main categories:

1. Aerobic (Cardiovascular) Workouts, and
2. Strength Building Workouts

Right here and now, we're going to be looking at both of these options individually, and letting you know what exactly you should be thinking about.

Remember, there are two main criteria for selecting the ideal exercise, and they are:

1. Choose something that you think that you'll enjoy
2. Choose something that you think you're capable of carrying out

Put it this way, there's no point in trying to run if your fitness is shot and you can barely run for a minute before you end up gasping for breath. Likewise, there's little to gain from walking on a treadmill if you find it so incredibly boring that you end up finding excuses to dodge having to work out.

End of the day, by choosing something that you like, and something that you're capable of doing, you'll be able to find the ideal prenatal workout plan!

So let's get right to it.

Aerobic (Cardiovascular) Workouts

Frankly speaking, this is the type of workout that is going to help you in many ways. Not only will it boost your blood circulation, but it'll also build your overall stamina, which will be doubly useful considering that you're carrying all that extra weight.

However, if you haven't been too active previously, you may very well have to start right at the bottom and build up your fitness. Even so, this alone is a good reason to get started sooner rather than later!

Generally speaking, aerobic exercises, or cardiovascular exercises as they're really called, help get the heart beating faster. In most cases they're used heavily by people who are trying to use weight because these kinds of exercises are a great way to spend energy.

Of course, you're not so interested about losing weight, but strengthening your cardiovascular and respiratory systems are definitely advantageous.

To get you off to a flying start, let's go over some of the options that you could choose from:

1. Brisk Walking

Generally speaking, brisk walking just means walking at a faster-than-normal pace. Strolling in the park is nice, but it isn't exactly very strenuous, unless you really aren't fit at all.

Honestly speaking, this is one of the best types of prenatal exercises, as it is low impact, and isn't going to cause any form of 'bouncing' motion (remember, you want to avoid this at all costs).

Even within this exercise, you have numerous options. If you like, you could head over to a gym and use a treadmill, or alternatively, you could even just walk outdoors.

End of the day, the choice is yours, but remember to pick something that isn't going to turn into a chore.

2. Jogging and Running

Naturally, jogging and running share many similar traits to brisk walking, but they are a slightly less than ideal form of prenatal workout.

In contrast to walking, jogging and running can distinctly cause 'bouncing' motion, especially if you push yourself too hard. Also, they're far more strenuous, and can really tire you out pretty fast, depending on your level of fitness.

If you have been running regularly, you could continue to do so during the first trimester or so of your pregnancy. However as you progress through it, you'll want to tone things down, and maybe look to other options.

Speaking of which – here's a great one...

3. Cycling

Unlike running and jogging, cycling is definitely low-impact, and you'll find that you can push yourself harder on a bicycle, or stationary bicycle, than you could by jogging or running, and still not end up having that undesirable 'bouncing' motion.

Of course, as you near term, you'll find that the seat itself could become very uncomfortable, which is a downside.

4. Swimming

Nowadays, swimming is being hailed as the best, safest, and most ideal prenatal exercise.

Why? Well, for one thing, swimming works a huge number of muscle groups at once, which means that you're going to be invariably getting a more complete workout than most other options.

Furthermore, because of the buoyancy of the water, you'll actually feel 'weightless' despite the extra weight that you're carrying.

All in all, as a cardiovascular exercises, swimming actually also doubles as a strength building exercise too – to a degree. By crossing the barrier between the two in this fashion, this is really something that you ought to consider.

5. Yoga, Tai Chi and Aerobics

Although there are vast differences between these three options, it serves to discuss them in one because they're all great forms of cardiovascular exercise that any pregnant woman can easily carry out.

Also, for each of these there are several types of motions that you shouldn't do, such as anything that involves you lying on your back, or extending your legs above the level of your waist.

In short – there are risks involved with taking any of these 3 options, so you should keep that in mind and be sure not to try to do the wrong sort of motions.

Many places nowadays have specialized prenatal aerobics and yoga classes, and you may even be able to find a good tai chi class as well. Anyway, so long as you're aware of the riskiness of certain movements, you should be fine.

6. Dance

Don't laugh! While some people may not think that dance is really a legitimate form of exercise, it fills all the needs, and can give you a great workout that is fun at the same time.

Admittedly, you're not going to be able to twist your body, or leap into the air – that would be risky. But still, you can go for basic dance lessons, or just go dancing, and get a nice and fun filled workout.

In short, you could stay fit while having fun, meeting others, and just losing yourself in the music.

Did you spot anything from amongst the options that we outlined that suited your fancy? Chances are you probably did, and if so – great!

If you didn't, don't despair, there are many other types of cardiovascular exercises, such as rowing, that you could try. Honestly, to list every type of aerobic-based exercise out there would take a long time.

Suffice to say, you should be able to easily find other options, but what we've given you are some of the best prenatal aerobic exercises that you could ever find.

One other thing to consider, while we're on the subject, is the question of sports. While naturally, contact sports and anything high-impact are off the table, this still leaves a large variety of sports that you can take part in.

Such things like tennis, table tennis, badminton, squash, and many others could be worth looking into.

As long as it's safe, you should be able to do it.

Anyway, seeing as we've sufficiently covered pretty much everything you need to know about cardiovascular prenatal exercises, let's move on to the other type of exercise that we're interested in discussing...

Strength Building Workouts

Unlike cardiovascular exercises, strength building workouts aren't about just picking an activity and going for it.

Instead, strength building is all about one thing and one thing alone: Resistance training.

That means performing movements that work particular muscle groups against some degree or other of resistance. See now why swimming can help in this regard? Being surrounded by water, and moving against it, is a type of resistance training.

While any form of resistance is fine, the most common form used is simple: Weights.

By moving weights around, you're adding extra resistance to your movement, and your muscles are going to need to work harder to accomplish each and every motion. This is the foundation of strength building.

However, prenatal strength building workouts are slightly different.

For one thing, working with weights can be dangerous, especially if you're going for heavy weights that have a large amount of resistance, which are the ideal tools for maximum strength building.

Such weights however increase the risk of muscle injury, and that's something that you know you want to avoid.

Based on that, you have two options, and they are:

1. Use lighter weights and go for more repetitions of each action, or
2. Carry out weight-free strength building workouts

Now the first option is simple, and really doesn't need much explanation. Pick a weight that you can move easily, and then use it, as opposed to a weight that you actually have to strain hard to heft.

But it is the second option that is more attractive, because it dramatically reduces the risk of injury, while at the same time allows you to carry out a strength building workout!

Let's look slightly deeper into that option, by giving you some places where you can start pursuing it:

1. Hamstring lifts

By lying on the right side of your body, and keeping yourself upright via your right elbow and forearm, you should then cross your left leg over your right one, in front of you.

Then, start to raise your right leg a few inches, as far as you can do so comfortably, before lowering it slowly to the floor.

Repeat it for the other side of your body.

2. Outer thigh lift

Once again, lie on the right side of your body, but this time with your head resting on your propped up right hand. Bend your right leg if you need additional balance.

Then, raise your left leg up a little, as far as possible, and hold it there, before slowly lowering it again.

Repeat this exercise for the other side of your body.

3. Chest muscle exercise

Clasp both your hands together in front of your chest, and press them together slowly for a few seconds.

Then, while keeping your fingers locked, pull your hands apart but don't let your grip loose. Rinse and repeat as much as you want.

4. Squats

Stand with your feet apart, about the same distance between them as your shoulders. Then, bend your knees and lower your buttocks.

Keep your back straight throughout, and never lower yourself so that your buttocks pass your knees. Once you've reached the lowest point possible (without going too low!), slowly rise up and repeat!

5. Wall Pushes

Stand facing any wall, with your feet apart at about a shoulder's length, and extend your palms so that they're flat on the wall. Then, lean towards the wall, bending your elbows as you do so, until your cheek is practically touching the wall (when you turn your head sideways).

After that, straighten your body again, by ‘pushing’ it off the wall. Be sure to use the strength of your arms to do so.

Great, we’ve covered 5 weight-free exercises that can help strength building. Are there others? Certainly! But for now these should give you a firm starting point from which to work from.

Anything and everything that allows you to use your muscles against some form of resistance is going to be the kind of exercise that you’re looking for, just be sure to stay away from what you know could be risky.

Equipped with the knowledge that you are, this shouldn’t be too difficult.

And with that – congratulations, you’re almost done finding out everything that you need to know about prenatal workouts. Let’s just go over the bulk of this guide one last time, so that you can be sure that you’re ready!

Starting Your Own Workouts, Today!

Armed with everything you know, you should be ready to start almost immediately, unless of course you feel that there is a need to seek some expert medical advice first.

Over the course of this guide, you should have learnt:

1. The importance of prenatal exercise
2. What preparation you need, and how to minimize your risks while exercising
3. How to get started with your prenatal workout, and warm up properly
4. All the different types of workouts that you could choose from

Does that sound about right? Be sure to check back to the appropriate section of this guide if something sounds amiss – you don’t want to get caught out because you didn’t grasp any part of what we’ve discussed.

If you are completely fine with everything you’ve learnt, then great! Get out there and put your body to work!

Good luck!