



## Diabetes and Exercise

If you are pregnant and have diabetes (either gestational or preexisting) should you exercise? The answer is **YES!!** Exercise can benefit overall fitness, helps control diabetes, and can be done safely.

### **What are the benefits of exercise during pregnancy?**

Exercise has many benefits some specific to diabetes and others applying to pregnancy in general. Several benefits are listed below:

- **Blood sugars will usually be lowered by regular, aerobic exercise.**

Exercise increases sensitivity to insulin in the body (whether made by the body or injected), and this effect may last for up to twenty four hours. If you do not have diabetes, exercise can decrease the risk of developing Gestational Diabetes (during pregnancy).

- **If diabetes is present and insulin is not required for control, it may be possible to avoid it altogether, or at least lower the chance that insulin injections will be needed during the third trimester.**

Those currently taking insulin can lower their requirements by exercising.

- **Exercise will prevent excess weight gain during pregnancy**

This weight is often difficult to lose after the baby is born! Exercise will also improve circulation, improve fitness, and may shorten labor and delivery time.

- **Regular exercise can reduce fatigue during pregnancy.**

Proper rest is important, but exercise can improve overall health and help reduce the discomforts of pregnancy.



## What are the best exercises?

Before exercising 5 - 10 minutes should be spent stretching to “warm up” the muscles and minimize the risk for ligament injury or cramping.

Aerobic exercise is the most beneficial in controlling blood sugar levels. This includes walking, stationary cycling, swimming or aqua-exercise, low-impact aerobics, and other exercises utilizing large muscle groups that are performed for extended periods.

Daily exercise for 15-60 minutes is recommended, however, less frequent exercise (3-4 days a week) can help control blood sugars and increase fitness. Blood sugars may be harder to control on rest days.

As pregnancy progresses, the type of exercise should shift to non-weight bearing forms for comfort and safety . An example of this would be shifting from running to swimming. When walking, wear flat shoes with cushioned soles. A 3 - 5 minute cool down (exercising at a lower pace) period should follow exercise to prevent dizziness or fainting.

Exercise should be performed at easy to moderate intensity. A practical measure of intensity is the “talk test.” If a conversation cannot be maintained while exercising, then the exercise intensity is too high!



### Helpful Hints...

- Patients who had a sedentary life-style prior to pregnancy, should not suddenly begin a strenuous exercise program. Instead, good judgment should be used by slowly increasing the activity level.
- Avoid exercise in the heat. Excessive prolonged exercise, such as heavy weight training for more than an hour without a break, may restrict blood flow to the fetus . If exercise is attempted when it is hot, restrict activity to less than 30 minutes, or take rest periods to cool off.
- Drink plenty of fluids (without caffeine) to keep hydrated and begin drinking before becoming thirsty. Cold fluids are best! If dizziness, faintness, or palpitations occur, exercise should be stopped immediately.
- Make sure to monitor blood sugars and eat additional carbohydrate snacks as needed to prevent low blood sugars. Watch out for low blood sugars that can occur after exercising! It is preferable to exercise after eating a snack or a meal.
- Balance can be less stable than usual in the later stages of pregnancy, so avoid exercise such as cycling outdoors, skiing or horseback riding. Opt for a stationary cycle, treadmill, walking or swimming instead.

### Where can I exercise?

**At home:** Several exercise videos are available for pregnant women which feature exercises that can be done at home. Visit the local video stores, a library, or ask a friend.

**Gyms:** Several gyms in the Tidewater area offer low-impact aerobics or aqua-aerobics classes for pregnant women. Some offer limited memberships for the time period of the pregnancy. If a complication preventing exercise develops, a credit will often be provided for the missed time.

**Trainers:** Check the local recreation centers, YMCA or private gyms and ask if any of the instructors/trainers are certified to work with pregnant women.

### WARNING!!

**You should consult your physician before engaging in any exercise program. Always use good judgment!!**

