



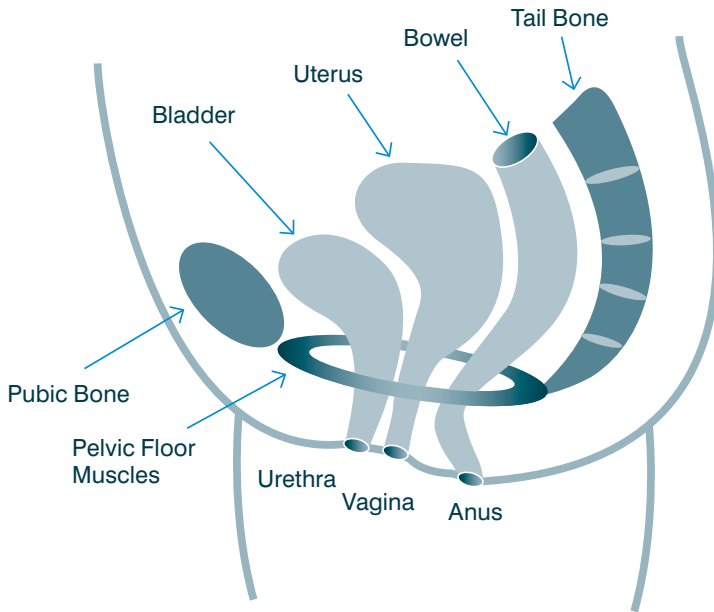
AUSTRALIAN
PHYSIOTHERAPY
ASSOCIATION

Look Good Feel Good

during pregnancy

Physiotherapy
advice and
exercises for
mums to be

How to exercise during pregnancy with physiotherapy



Strengthening your pelvic floor

Strong pelvic floor muscles will help support the weight of the growing baby. Stronger muscles also help reduce urine leakage during pregnancy and improve postnatal recovery of bladder control.

Getting into position

Begin by sitting or lying comfortably on your side. Once you are confident in performing this exercise, it can be done in any position, eg. sitting or standing.

Slow lifts

Tighten and lift the muscles around the anus, vagina and urethra. Hold strongly for 5-10 seconds. If you feel the muscles tiring, release the hold.

Repeat 5-10 times, resting for 10-15 seconds between each exercise.

Do not hold your breath while doing this exercise.

Fast lifts

Pull the same muscles up and forward towards the pubic bone with a quick, strong lift. Release and repeat 5-10 times.

Exercise the pelvic floor muscles three times a day, with slow and fast lifts in each session. Make this a lifetime habit.

Remember to consciously tighten and lift your pelvic floor muscles before lifting, carrying, coughing or sneezing, and maintain throughout the activity .

Keeping good posture

Your posture will alter as your pregnancy advances. To feel good – and look good – it is important to stand and sit with correct body alignment and postural awareness.

Abdominal bracing exercise

Abdominal bracing stabilises and controls the tilt of the pelvis, supports your back and maintains abdominal tone. Try to make this part of your postural care throughout all daily activities.

Position: Kneel on hands and knees, sit, stand or lie on your side.

Action: As you breathe out, gently pull in your lower abdominal muscles, hugging your baby towards your spine. Breathe normally and maintain the abdominal brace for 3-5 seconds initially. Repeat 5-10 times. Your target is ten repetitions holding for ten seconds.

Pelvic tilt

As your baby grows, the tilt of the pelvis changes, putting a strain on your back. Becoming aware of this tilt and being able to control it reduces the strain and improves back comfort.

Position 1: Kneel on your hands and knees with your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips.

Action: Slowly breathe out. Tighten your tummy muscles, tuck your tail and head under and curl your whole spine. Hold this position, breathing normally. Release slowly. Do not hollow your back. Return to starting position and repeat a 5-10 times. (This movement can also be done standing, sitting or lying on your side).



Position 2: Sit well supported with your feet flat and your bottom back into the chair.

Action: As you breathe out, tighten your tummy muscles to lift baby up to your rib cage; flatten lower back into chair to tuck tail under. Hold and release slowly. Repeat a 5-10 times.

Taking care of your back

Hormonal changes during pregnancy make it more likely that you will experience back pain.

Lifting

Avoid unnecessary bending and lifting.

Do not lift any heavy or awkward objects. When you do need to bend, bend your knees and keep your back straight. Do not twist.

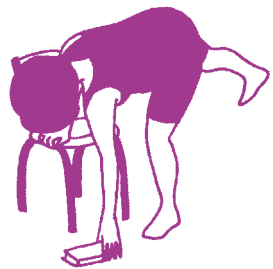
Remember to brace the lower abdominal and pelvic floor muscles during and before lifting.

When bending to lift light articles, put your weight on one leg, bend forward from the hip, keep your back straight, and allow the other leg to lift backwards off the ground.

Use your hand to balance.

Reminders:

- Brace abdominal and pelvic floor muscles when lifting and changing position.
- Lift with bent knees. Make your legs do the work, not your back.
- To ease back pain, rest on your side, using pillows to support your leg and tummy.
- Consult a physiotherapist if back pain persists.



Coping with discomfort – stretches and strategies to help

Hold all stretches for 15-30 seconds. Keep steady – do not bounce.

1. Dealing with backache

Lower Back

Kneel on your hands and knees. Sit with your bottom back towards your heels, knees just apart to make room for baby. Rest your upper body weight on bent forearms. Slowly stretch your arms forward. Hold.



Upper Back

In a seated position, brace your abdominal muscles and interlace your fingers. Lift your arms overhead keeping elbows straight and turning palms upwards. Hold.



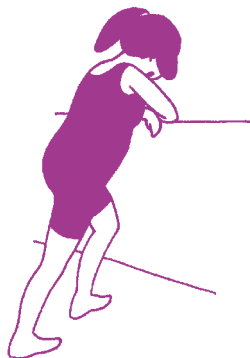
2. Leg cramps

Calf stretch

Stand with both hands against a wall. Place one leg back with your knee straight, heel flat on the floor and toes pointed straight ahead. Slowly lean forward, bending the front knee.

Hold and feel the stretch in your calf muscle.

Repeat for the other leg.



3. Swollen ankles

Exercises to improve your circulation should reduce ankle swelling.

- (a) Bend and stretch your ankles.
- (b) Circle ankles in both directions.

4. Varicose veins

- **Avoid:** prolonged periods of standing, sitting with your legs crossed, prolonged squatting and wearing knee high stockings.
- Repeat rising up and down on your toes to promote circulation in lower limbs.
- If wearing support stockings, put these on after your feet have been elevated, or first thing in the morning.
- Regular walking is good for improving circulation – why not join a walking program?

Flexibility for labour and birth

Pregnancy hormones help tissues to stretch in preparation for birth, and using upright positions during birth may shorten labour. Improving the strength and flexibility of the legs and hip joints during pregnancy may be helpful in making birth positions more comfortable for you during the second stage, as baby descends through the pelvic outlet.

Sit on a low stool so that your knees are higher than your hips with feet apart and flat on the floor. Maintain this position for 10 seconds and gradually increase to 60 seconds or more. Lower the height of the stool or squat on a cushion if this gets easy.

If you feel any pain in the pelvis (pubic symphysis or sacro-iliac joints), hip, back or knees change or avoid this exercise. Consult your Women's Health Physiotherapist for advice.

General fitness

In addition to these specific exercises, you should do general fitness activities to keep your heart and lungs in good order.

Activities such as walking, swimming or cycling for about 30 minutes, three or four times each week, will improve your fitness and strength.

Always warm up for 5-10 minutes and cool down for five minutes.



Everything changes when you're pregnant

Pregnancy brings constant physical changes to your body. But, with care, you can enjoy the benefits of exercise, unless there are medical reasons not to do so. Your Women's Health Physiotherapist can help you plan a suitable program to keep you feeling your best before – and after – the birth.

Exercise on a regular basis. General and specific exercises will help to improve your level of fitness, strength and your general sense of wellbeing. This is also important in helping to speed your recovery after the birth of your baby.

Rest – always balance exercise with rest. Sleep or a relaxation session may be the best thing at times of fatigue or anxiety.

Keep off your back! Physiotherapists do not recommend sustained exercise while lying on your back.

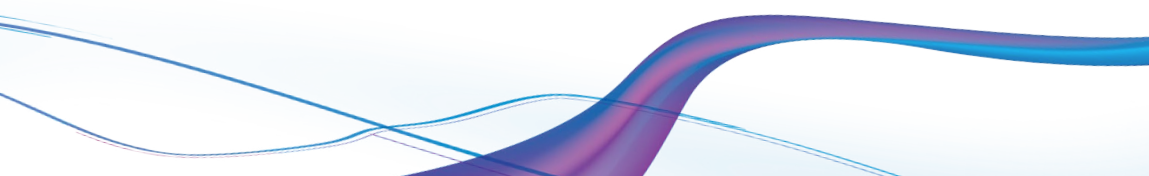
Lying flat on your back during pregnancy can restrict the blood flow from your legs to your heart and has the potential to affect blood flow to your baby.

A few points to remember:

- Listen to your body. If any activity causes pain or strain, stop and consult a physiotherapist.
- Drink water before, during and after exercising.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- Background music can make your exercise more enjoyable.

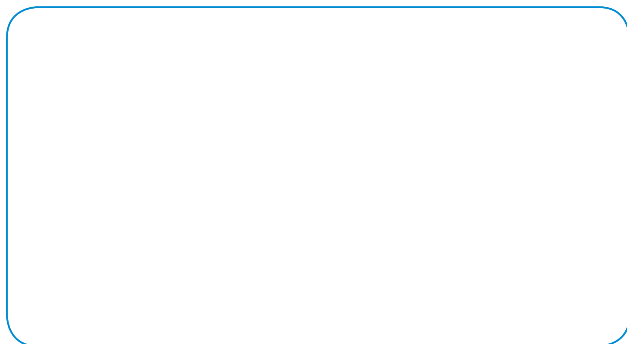
Warnings

- Do not hold your breath when doing your pelvic floor exercises.
- Do not exercise if you are overtired.
- Hold stretches steady – do not bounce.
- This brochure is a supplement to a course of instruction and is not a substitute for advice from a qualified physiotherapist.





Give your body the best of care. Consult your local
Continence and Women's Health Physiotherapist.



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