

Exercise During Pregnancy

Forget the old wives tales, regular exercise combined with the right nutritional advice can have a huge impact on you and your baby.

Recent research indicates that the benefits of women exercising throughout pregnancy are far reaching, helping you prepare for the rigours of labour and returning to your pre-pregnancy figure much sooner.

It surprises me how many women, and even more so, how many health professionals are still not clear on the benefits of exercising throughout pregnancy. Even with an abundance of research evidence to the contrary many women still believe myths such as 'resistance training is unsuitable during pregnancy' and 'exercise will harm your baby or cause miscarriage'. So let's set the record straight. What are the benefits for mother and baby? And what is appropriate exercise throughout pregnancy?

"Recent research by Dr James Clapp MD (Exercising Through Your Pregnancy, Addicus Books) has shown that women who exercise regularly during pregnancies have a 35 per cent decrease in the need for pain relief during labour; 75 per cent decrease in the incidence of maternal exhaustion in labour; are 50 per cent less likely to be induced or to need an episiotomy; and 75 per cent less likely to need forceps or a caesarean" says physiotherapist and mum, Lauren Gabriel, one of the creators of the Preggi Bellies – Training for 2 ante and post-natal exercise program. The Preggi Bellies program is a choreographed fitness program on swiss balls, which includes aerobic and resistance exercise.

"Exercise is also good for the baby," says Gabriel "The same research has also shown that the placentas of women who exercise regularly in early to mid pregnancy grow faster and function better than those of women who don't."

Since each woman and each pregnancy is different, it is important to seek advice from your obstetrician or treating medical professional before embarking on a new exercise program. And you will need to

make some changes to your normal fitness regime especially as pregnancy advances through the second and third trimesters. It is recommended that you follow a program designed specifically for pregnant women.

We know that back pain is a common and chronic problem for many people however more than 50 per cent of pregnant women (especially during the third trimester of pregnancy) are affected by back pain. This can largely be attributed to the change in posture and the stretching of abdominal muscles as the baby grows.

Training the core abdominal muscles will greatly reduce the risk of back pain and injury during pregnancy and childbirth. We already know that swiss balls are a great unstable training platform for developing core stability but what about during pregnancy? Edwina Griffin a Personal Trainer of women for over 10 years says "I have used the mediBall for many years with my pregnant clients and with great success". So much so, that Edwina has developed a training program using the mediBall, which will be released on DVD in early April. "My clients are often looking for exercises they can do in the privacy of their own home in between training sessions but there are very few products available which are up-to-date and tailored to the special needs of pregnant women." The DVD entitled 'FitMum' is an all round wellness guide to a happy and healthy pregnancy including information from experts regarding birthing and nutrition and resistance training tailored to your stage of pregnancy.

Maintaining 'functional fitness' is also an important element during pregnancy. Functional fitness refers to how well your body copes with everyday activity such as hanging out washing, vacuuming and lifting children. Continual twisting and bending can place strain on the back and if you aren't functionally fit can easily lead to injury. A woman is already facing the challenge of changing posture and weight distribution due to the growing weight of

the baby so exercising on an unstable platform (like a swiss ball) is an effective way of maintaining functional fitness, strengthening the core stability system and reducing risk of injury and back pain.

The NSW Department of Sport & Recreation claims, that "At no point in a women's life is general fitness more crucial than during pregnancy and childbirth". And this statement is supported by a mass of current research findings. Research indicates that exercise during pregnancy can assist in reducing weight gain, improving mood and sleep patterns, increase rate of weight loss after pregnancy and help in the prevention of illness such as gestational diabetes and post-natal depression. Some studies have also shown that exercise can assist in a faster labour and a woman is less likely to need an assisted (forceps) or operative birth.

Your pregnancy is one of the most exciting times of your life. Following sound nutritional advice and an exercise program designed especially for you can greatly enhance this extraordinary experience. So enjoy this journey with your baby and you will both benefit.

Preggi Bellies – Training for 2 (video \$29.95 & DVD \$35.00) and FitMum (DVD \$35.00) are available from Rebel Sport or by calling AOK Health on 1300 655 575. **F**

