



PREGNANCY & EXERCISE



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Pregnancy and the initial months following birth are an exciting time.

During pregnancy your body will go through a number of changes, and some of these will affect your ability to exercise, or cause you to modify your exercise routine. WDS Pilates classes have been designed based on the latest research and evidence to help you continue with a safe exercise program and prepare you for the physical demands of pregnancy, labour and childbirth.



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Exercise during pregnancy

Exercise during pregnancy offers many physical and emotional benefits such as:

- ✓ Enjoyment
- ✓ Stronger back muscles, which can help manage back pain & strain as your belly grows
- ✓ Improved posture
- ✓ Improved circulation
- ✓ Preparation for the physical demands of labour
- ✓ Faster return to pre-pregnancy fitness and healthy weight
- ✓ More energy
- ✓ Increased ability to cope with the physical demands of motherhood
- ✓ Weight control
- ✓ Stress relief
- ✓ Faster recuperation after labour
- ✓ Improved sleep and management of insomnia

As each pregnancy is different, WDS recommends you discuss your exercise plan with your doctor before commencing. However, research has shown that if you were active prior to becoming pregnant, you should be able to continue to exercise, reducing the intensity by 25-30%. If you were previously inactive, then gradually increasing your exercise is beneficial to both mother and baby.



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Common conditions during pregnancy

Pelvic Instability/Pelvic Girdle Pain

Pelvic instability or pelvic girdle pain refers to pain felt at the back of the pelvis, on one or both sides, and/or pain over the public joint. As many as 50% of women experience this pain during pregnancy. It is often caused by the softening and increased mobility of your pelvic joints. From your first trimester, the hormone 'relaxin' is released to increase the laxity of ligaments, especially around your pelvis. This helps your baby to pass through your pelvis during birth.

As the ligaments become stretchy, your muscles need to work harder to maintain good control of the joints. However, if your muscles are not able to maintain good movement at the joints, extra stress is placed on the ligaments resulting in inflammation and pain. This pain is often exacerbated by weight bearing activities, particularly when lifting one leg, such as walking or climbing stairs.

Initial rest may be needed to settle severe pain, however, exercise is important to strengthen the muscles that stabilise your pelvic joints.

Sciatic Pain

Sciatica is a painful syndrome caused by compression or irritation of the sciatic nerve, a nerve placed deep in the buttock that runs down the leg. Sciatic pain can occur during pregnancy due to the altered mechanics of the pelvis and lower back as the baby grows and develops. Symptoms may include:

- pain in the buttock or down the leg
- numbness
- muscular weakness
- pins and needles or tingling
- difficulty moving or controlling the leg.

Gentle muscle release using a spiky ball or foam roller can help relieve the symptoms of sciatica. Strengthening the muscles that support the lower back and hip joints can also assist in the prevention and management of pain.



Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Hormones associated with pregnancy cause general fluid retention, which can sometimes compress the median nerve. Carpal tunnel syndrome can create wrist pain (particularly at night), pins and needles or numbness, radiated or referred pain into the arm or shoulder. Carpal tunnel syndrome triggered by pregnancy usually goes away soon after birth..

Rectus Diastasis

Rectus Diastasis is the painless splitting of the connective tissue joining the abdominal muscles at the midline. As the baby grows, the abdominal wall muscles and their connective tissue attachments widen and stretch. A diastasis recti occurs when the connective tissue widens and splits. Traditional sit-ups or crunches may worsen this condition, therefore it is recommended that you avoid sit-ups or crunches throughout your pregnancy.

It is normal to have a separation during pregnancy, however, it is important to see a specialised physiotherapist who can assess your muscles and ensure the separation improves postpartum.



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Prenatal classes at WDS

WDS Pilates classes have been designed based on the most up to date research and evidence, to provide a safe workout that assists you to remain strong, supple and happily active for the full course of your pregnancy and prepare you for labour and childbirth.

- Strengthening pelvic floor muscles as these are weakened during pregnancy and birth
- Strengthening abdominals to help prevent or relieve lower back pain
- Strengthening legs to help or prevent fluid retention, leg cramps and varicose veins
- Strengthening upper body to prepare you for the physical demands of lifting and carrying a growing baby
- Gentle stretching to release tension (especially in the lower back, neck and shoulders).

Each class will aim to improve stability, strength and endurance which are all essential for a healthy pregnancy, labour, delivery and recovery.



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General guidelines for safe exercise during pregnancy

1. Talk with your doctor or midwife before commencing a new exercise program. In addition, if you develop an illness or a complication of pregnancy, talk with your doctor or midwife before continuing or restarting your exercise program.
2. Avoid raising your body temperature too high.
3. Don't exercise to the point of exhaustion.
4. Always work at less than 75% of your maximum heart rate.
5. Keep your level of exertion to 12-14 on a scale of 1-20
6. Drink plenty of water
7. Listen to your body - don't exercise if you are feeling ill, feverish or tired.



Post natal considerations

Many of the physiological changes that occur throughout pregnancy can continue through to the post-natal period. Therefore, it is important to continue to take precautions with exercise:

- Please talk to your doctor or midwife before commencing exercise postpartum.
- After a vaginal delivery, it is recommended that you wait at least 6 weeks before commencing any group exercise classes. More closely supervised exercise, such as clinical Pilates, can be commenced earlier if approved by your supervising health professional. You can commence gentle daily walking and pelvic floor contractions when you feel ready.
- A caesarean delivery creates more deep abdominal trauma, therefore it is recommended you do not lift anything heavier than your baby for the first 6 weeks. You can commence more strenuous exercise 12 weeks postpartum, but please discuss this with your doctor or midwife.



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