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Fit Pregnancy Tips

from a fitness model Mum

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALL SOURCED UP



The female body is an incredible machine of restoration and resilience. And while it is certainly necessary to slow down as our bodies experience the changes of pregnancy, humans were built to move. Oxygen ambassador **Amelia Ricci** reminds us why moving our bodies shouldn't cease after conception.

As I write this article, I'm 30 weeks pregnant with baby number two. Pregnancy can be challenging, so I've put together my best tips to help you exercise safely, maintain a positive mindset and understand the changes that will happen in your body.

As a bikini and fitness model competitor for many years I'm aware of the body image issues, worries about safe training during pregnancy and ultimately the desire to get back in shape post-baby. However, during pregnancy it's

important to listen to your body, slow down your training and ultimately make changes according to what's right for you.

Whether it's your first pregnancy or you're already a mum, you might have expectations about getting in shape post-baby. This is natural. But the best thing you can do is take the pressure off yourself and just enjoy the journey. Focus on growing a healthy baby and remaining as fit as possible, but if you do need to slow down, then embrace that too!

Here's my top tips to maintain your health, mental wellbeing and to stay fit during your pregnancy:

PREGNANCY WORKOUT

MODIFICATIONS They say that the early bird catches the worm, and I've always been one to live by an early morning workout. However, since becoming pregnant I've been so exhausted that the 5am wake-up doesn't feel right. So, I do the next best thing, which is a late morning workout after I drop off my son to childcare. It can feel like you are failing when you cut back your exercise routine, but even a small amount of regular resistance training is beneficial combined with low-intensity exercise such as walking, swimming or yoga. For example, I have reduced my workout sessions from six days a week to three, and now train for 30 minutes each time rather than 60.

Over the nine months of pregnancy, your body will change so it's essential to adapt your routine accordingly. Remember: it's consistency over time, adding in pregnancy specific routines (such as pelvic floor exercises), that will keep you fit and strong for labour and beyond. As a pre- and post-natal fitness professional, I recommend carefully planned strength workouts and adapting them each trimester. It might feel confronting to modify and regress, and even omit many exercises, but this is the key to staying active.

EAT TO NOURISH BABY

Thankfully the days when pregnant women were encouraged to "eat for two" are over. We all know that there is no need to eat a huge calorie surplus, however, there are important RDIs for nutrients to be met. Eating plenty of fresh produce plus avoiding potentially dangerous foods (containing listeria) will ensure a healthy mum and baby.

Sometimes eating meals is not easy due to food aversions, feeling physically ill or just not feeling hungry. I always feel full when pregnant and therefore find that I nourish my body and baby for energy, not actual physical hunger.

Let me explain further: when you are pregnant your digestion slows, so it can be hard to feel like drinking water, or eating a meal, and especially if you are suffering nausea and/or morning sickness. If you are exercising regularly it's important to have small snacks pre- and post-workout to avoid low blood sugar which may make you feel faint or dizzy. Unlike my days as a fitness model on competition preparation (when I would eat or drink in response to hunger), during pregnancy I nourish and hydrate for baby's wellbeing.

THE TABLE BELOW OUTLINES THE MAIN MODIFICATIONS FOR PREGNANCY:

INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES	AVOID THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES
Gradual warm-up and cool-down.	High-impact or jerky movements.
Focus on strengthening pregnancy specific muscles such as pelvic floor, core and postural muscles.	Avoid feeling hot, exhausted or excessively sweaty.
Modified strength training.	Sudden changes of position or intensity.
Modified positions for supine (lying on your back) activities e.g. four-point kneeling, sitting on a Fitball and side lying.	Any exercise that involves breath holding.
Flexibility and stretching to be limited to a comfortable range of movement.	Any exercise that places significant load on the abdominals or pelvic floor including abdominal curls/sit ups, planks/hovers.
Relaxation, meditation and pregnancy yoga class.	Contact activities (to minimise falls and excessive blows to the abdominal region).
Low-impact activities such as stationary bike, walking and cross trainer at a low to moderate intensity.	Any exercise that may exacerbate a pregnancy-related condition (for example, pelvic instability and abdominal separation.)
Avoid the risk of overheating by exercising in a well-ventilated or air-conditioned environment.	Weight-bearing activities beyond comfortable range of movement.



DRINK WATER EVEN WHEN YOU

DON'T FEEL LIKE IT Drinking water is especially important during pregnancy. Dehydration is dangerous for everyone but most especially a pregnant woman. Dehydration can cause headaches, drastic blood pressure changes and possible fainting, especially in hot weather. Water will even keep your amniotic fluid to a healthy level and help your baby's kidneys doing their job in the womb. Hydration is especially important when exercising as fluids are often lost via sweat. And in the third trimester a lack of water in your body can cause contractions, potentially sending you into pre-term labour which can be dangerous for both you and baby.

ELEVATE YOUR FEET Speaking of fluid retention, you might be lucky, but for me, the second and third trimesters mean swollen, legs, ankles and feet by about 3pm every day. This side-effect of pregnancy is normal, according to the American Pregnancy Association who report: "During pregnancy, the body produces approximately 50 per cent more blood and body fluids to meet the needs of the developing baby. Swelling is a normal part of pregnancy that is caused by this additional blood and fluid. Normal swelling, which is also called oedema, is experienced in the hands, face, legs, ankles, and feet. This extra retention of fluid is needed to soften the body, which enables it to expand as the baby develops."

My solution for swollen legs and feet is to elevate my feet on a chair or a footstool and it makes all the difference!

AVOID OVERHEATING We've all heard the slogan "Seek shade from a tree between 11 and 3". The Slip! Slop! Slap! campaign is well known in Australia, and there is a lot of truth to staying indoors in air conditioning during these hottest hours. Normally I enjoy the summer, except when I am pregnant! When I'm pregnant I stay indoors for the hottest part of the day when possible. Let's face it this is not easy because I have a 3-year-old who is extremely active and wants nothing more than to go outdoors. However, I simply cannot stand the heat and feel so drained and exhausted from the hot temperature and air.

If you feel the heat when pregnant you are not alone, so it's important to listen to the messages your body is giving you as these signals (or instincts) are present for a reason.

According to kidshealth.org: "If your body temperature goes above 102°F (38.9°C) for more than 10 minutes, the elevated heat can cause problems with the foetus. Overheating in the first trimester can lead to neural tube defects and miscarriage. Later in the pregnancy, it can lead to dehydration in the mother." Be kind to yourself and if something

feels instinctively wrong, or uncomfortable it is your body's way of telling that it is not right.

GET INSPIRED BY CONNECTING WITH FIT MUMS One of the most exciting things for me as a bikini competitor and coach is bringing fit mums to the bikini or fitness model competitions. This goes to show that your life is not over after pregnancy. Many fitness and bikini competition divisions now offer a 'fit momma' category, which allows you to stand on stage among other fit mums. Many women feel more confident wearing a one-piece swimsuit, which is an option at these competitions. These 'fit momma' events can be seen in the contest running order for most bodybuilding federations. A competition is a great goal post-baby; just remember to take your time and never compare or put pressure on yourself to get back in shape.

YOUR OWN PREGNANCY JOURNEY Remember that intense workouts may not feel right. While some women lift weights and do cardio right up until the day they give birth, this isn't a realistic option for everyone. One of my biggest lessons from pregnancy was to listen to my body and not feel let down if I am not up to training. Remember: it'll be worth it.

Despite the bladder issues and the extra support for your belly and chest, many women still say exercising during pregnancy feels great. The best part is knowing that you will be fit for labour and for the first few months of caring for a newborn that demands around-the-clock care.

Plus, not even a baby bump can get in the way of a post-workout endorphin rush. I love the post-exercise high and knowing that staying active is beneficial not only to me but to my baby as well and is great motivation to continue to hit the gym.

One more bonus is that you'll never really be working out alone. The best thing about exercising while pregnant is the little kicks you feel while moving around. I love that little kick or punch; it feels like my little internal cheering squad!

Finally, it's important to consult your midwife and/or obstetrician to determine which exercise may be right for you. Your medical professionals understand your unique situation and can recommend exactly what you should follow to ensure a healthy pregnancy.

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