

**Exercising during pregnancy is extremely beneficial for the health of the mother as well as her growing fetus.** The many physical and psychological benefits of exercise can be gained at all fitness levels. Following the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists guidelines on exercise and being aware of the contraindications to exercise will help to allow for maximum safety and health for the duration of the pregnancy. Exercise programs should be developed on an individual basis and should include a health assessment.

### **Benefits to the Mother**

- Improves circulation
- Helps control weight gain
- Increases cardiovascular and muscular endurance
- Enhances energy level, mood and self-image
- Improves posture to help reduce back pain
  - Reduces swelling and leg cramps
  - Shortens labor with less medical intervention

### **Benefits to the Fetus**

- Reduces risk of miscarriage
- Provides endorphins for fetus
- Soothes and comforts fetus
- Optimum blood flow to fetus
- Helps brain/tissues to function optimally

### ***The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Guidelines***

The following guidelines should be followed to assure a safe and effective exercise program during pregnancy. *Each woman's exercise program should be personalized based on her previous exercise schedule, obstetric status and stage of pregnancy.*

- Obtain a medical clearance if initiating an exercise program or altering a previous program
- Keep in communication with your physician after the initial clearance
- Warm-up for 10-15 minutes prior to exercise and cool-down for 10-15 minutes after exercise
- Exercise regularly, at least 3 times a week, rather than sporadically
- Engage in mild to moderate low-impact type activities
- Never exercise to exhaustion and stop when fatigued
- Avoid jerky, bouncy, high impact movements or those which may cause loss of balance
- Caloric intake should be adequate to meet the extra energy needs of both pregnancy and exercise
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated before, during and after exercise

### **Stop exercising and consult your physician if you experience any of the following contraindications:**

- Pain
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty walking
- Uterine contractions
- Irregular heart beats
- Vaginal bleeding
- Dizziness/faintness

### **ACOG guidelines for discontinuing an exercise program**

- Pregnancy induced hypertension
- Pre-term rupture of membranes
- Pre-term labor during the prior or
- Incompetent cervix
- Persistent second or third trimester bleeding
- Intrauterine growth retardation

## Bodily Changes During the Trimesters

The body goes through different changes each trimester, so it is important to be aware of your body and how these changes may alter your ability to exercise.



### Trimester 1

- Most women will experience a decrease in physical fitness, therefore do not be alarmed if more effort is required during various activities
- Avoid prolonged or strenuous exercise
- Increase heat evaporation by ensuring adequate hydration, wearing breathable clothing and exercising in a cool, low humidity environment
- Sense of balance will be altered throughout the pregnancy, therefore avoid quick, jerky movements which could cause a loss of balance
- Resting heart rate increases



### Trimester 2

- This is the best time to gradually progress duration or intensity of exercise since the risks and discomfort of exercise are lowest and energy is elevated
- Avoid exercise in the supine (on back) position for the remainder of the pregnancy



### Trimester 3

- Physical fitness will decrease as body weight increases
- Gradually switch to non-weight bearing activities if currently performing weight bearing exercises
- Decrease the intensity and duration of exercise
- Deeper breathing will be required to meet the increased needs for oxygen due to the enlarged uterus pushing the diaphragm upward

### Developing Your Exercise Program

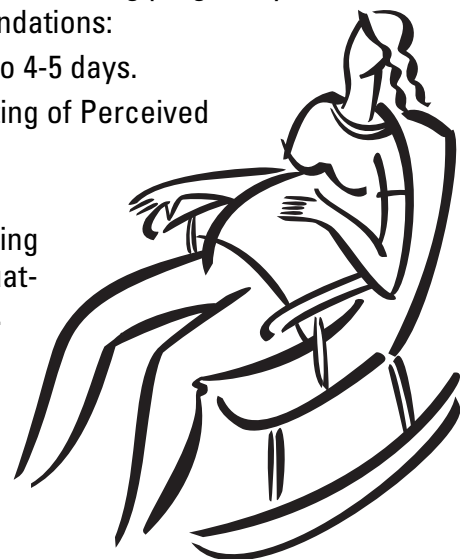
After consulting with a physician, when planning an exercise program during pregnancy, use the following FITT (Frequency, Intensity, Time, Type) recommendations:

**FREQUENCY:** Begin at 3 times per week and gradually progress to 4-5 days.

**INTENSITY:** Mild to moderate exercise within an appropriate Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) range of 5-6 on a scale of 1-10.

**TIME:** 15-30 minutes adding rest intervals when needed.

**TYPE:** Non-weight bearing or low-impact endurance exercise using large muscle groups. Walking, recumbent bike, swimming, aquatic exercises, low impact aerobics and rowing are encouraged.



*For more information on exercising during pregnancy, contact an Exercise Specialist at The National Institute for Fitness and Sport at 317-274-3432 or visit our website at [www.nifs.org](http://www.nifs.org).*