
Exercises for pregnant women

Following are some exercises for pregnant women. If you want more information about pre and post natal exercises, ask your caregiver or childbirth educator.

Posture check

1. Tighten buttock muscles to decrease low back curve.
2. Check in mirror for good body alignment.
3. Tip: Walk as if there was a string running from the top of your head to the ceiling.



Back care tips

- When lifting, bend your knees, not your back. Hold objects as close to your body as possible.
- Don't over reach for objects on high shelves.
- When carrying many items, try to balance the load equally on both side
- Do a posture check often each day.
- When standing for long periods, rest one foot on a stool. Regularly move your feet in small circles.
- Use the strength of your legs when getting up and down.
- When getting up from a lying position turn to your side first and push up with your arms. Then turn on to your knees and push your body upright taking care to keep your back straight. Use a sturdy piece of furniture or another person to support yourself as you stand from the kneeling position.
- Reverse when you lie down

Pelvic tilt

This exercise is important for good posture and helps reduce lower backache. Practice it every day. You can do it while lying, sitting, standing, or on your hands and knees.

1. To tilt your pelvis, pull in your abdominal muscles.
2. Squeeze your buttocks together flattening the curve of your lower back.
3. Relax.

Calf stretches

This exercise helps increase blood flow to the legs and relieves calf cramps.

1. Stand facing the wall with one foot in front of the other.
2. Press your palms against the wall.
3. Keep back leg straight with heels firmly on the floor.
4. Lean towards the wall.



Inner thigh stretches

This exercise helps prepare you for birth when you may have to hold your legs apart for a long time.

1. Sit in a butterfly position with heels together and pulled close to your body.
2. Gently press both knees towards the floor, being careful not to force them down more than what is comfortable.
3. Relax.



Squatting

We as a culture do not spend much time in the squatting position. Squatting is good for strengthening thigh and back muscle and increases flexibility. Squatting is a very good position for many women in labor. The squat uses gravity and allows your pelvis to open, creating more space for your baby to come down. If you are not used to squatting it may be hard to do it at first. Proceed slowly and use sturdy furniture for support.

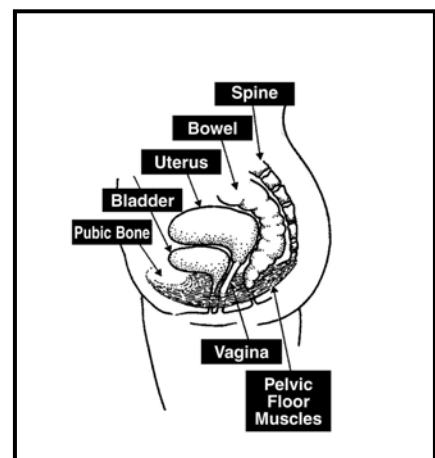
Squatting is easier if your heels can be flat on the floor. If you are unable to do this to begin with use a rolled up towel or a thin book under your heels. As you become more flexible you may be able to do without this support.



Start with your feet comfortably apart facing a chair. With your back straight, hold on to the chair for support as you squat down with your knees pointing slightly outward. Hold this position for as long as you are comfortable. Stand slowly, shake out your legs and repeat. Once you are comfortable squatting with support try it without holding on. Use a chair or your partner to stand up slowly.

Pelvic floor exercise (Kegels)

Pelvic floor exercises, known as Kegel exercises, strengthen the muscles around your vagina. This group of muscles also holds up your bladder, urethra, bowel and uterus. As your unborn baby grows these muscles have to work harder to bear the weight of the baby, placenta, amniotic fluid and a larger uterus. Like any other muscle this group benefits from regular exercise. For women, this is an important lifetime exercise. The benefits of strengthening these muscles include:



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- During pregnancy the pelvic floor muscles support your growing baby.
 - During childbirth these muscles must relax and stretch as your baby is born.
 - After your baby is born these muscles help control body functions like passing urine or bowel movements.
 - Good pelvic floor muscle tone can help you enjoy sex more. You can do this exercise when you're lying, sitting or standing.
 - Pull up and tighten the pelvic floor muscles (as if you are stopping the flow of urine).

Try these three types of Kegel exercises:

1. **Slow and sustained:** Squeeze and lift slowly, holding for about 5 to 10 seconds as firmly as possible, then release. Repeat up to 10 times.
2. **Quick and Short:** Squeeze and lift quickly, holding for 1 to 2 seconds as firmly as possible, then release. Repeat up to 10 times.
3. **Holding under pressure:** Squeeze and lift quickly and while holding do a small cough, then release. This will help you get used to using your pelvic floor muscles when there is increased pressure on them when coughing, sneezing or getting up out of a chair. Repeat 2 to 3 times. Once you are familiar with this exercise, it is important to practice it standing up as this is when the pressure is greatest on the pelvic floor.

REMEMBER!

- Do not bear down.
- Do not hold your breath.
- Do not overuse the muscles, build up gradually.
- Fully relax the muscles after each contraction.
- ***Do not do Kegels while passing your urine because it could lead to incomplete emptying of your bladder.***

Help yourself remember to do Kegels by pairing them with something you do many times each day (no one will know what you are doing if you keep your face relaxed). Do Kegels when you:

- wash your hands after going to the washroom
- ride public transportation
- watch TV
- talk on the phone or answer your email
- wait in line or in a doctor's office
- wait at a red light or stop sign
- give your partner a hug

Continue to do Kegels after the baby arrives to keep your pelvic floor muscles toned.