

# Moving through motherhood

Follow these safe and healthy ways to stay active during and after pregnancy.

BY NAILA EDRIES

**P**regnancy and childbirth are incredible journeys. But they can also take a toll on a woman's body. Many women experience pain or discomfort in the lower back, pelvis and lower limbs during and after pregnancy. These discomforts are often attributed to the physical changes and increased load placed on the musculoskeletal system to accommodate the growing foetus and uterus, and due to hormonal shifts that occur priming the body for labour and ensuring healthy foetal growth and development. While complaints of musculoskeletal pain are common, especially in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy, these symptoms can affect women's sleep, daily function, and even mood and relations with others.

Physiotherapy offers relief during pregnancy, helping women manage discomfort, stay active, maintain function, and build strength in preparation for childbirth and post-

partum recovery. Physiotherapists are trained to provide targeted exercises to support the body and reduce strain and discomfort, safely perform massage and joint mobilisations to relieve symptoms, and advise expectant mothers on safe mobility and how to maintain healthy levels of physical activity. In short, physiotherapy empowers pregnant women to feel stronger, more comfortable, and better prepared for birth and early motherhood.

Staying active during pregnancy is both safe and beneficial when done gradually. Women can start with gentle activities like walking or swimming, and increase intensity based on comfort and fitness level, guided by a physiotherapist or healthcare provider. Regular walking and gentle physical activity during pregnancy can boost energy levels, improve mood, reduce aches, reduce swelling, and support healthy weight gain.

If you were inactive before pregnancy

and, provided there are no medical reasons preventing you from exercising, begin with 10-minute walks a few times per week, gradually building up to 30 minutes a day on most days of the week. Walk at a comfortable pace, where you can still hold a conversation without getting out of breath. Drink water to maintain hydration, and avoid walking

in extreme heat or humidity, rather selecting cooler times of the day. As your body shape and size changes during pregnancy, your balance may be affected so it's best to walk on flat, even surfaces and wear supportive footwear to help reduce the risk of falls.

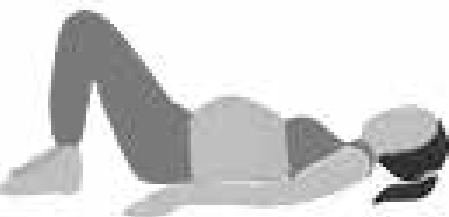
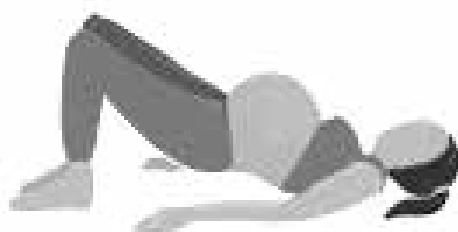
Below are a few examples of back strengthening exercises.

**PELVIC TILTS**

**Start position:** Lie on your back with knees bent. During the third trimester, you can support the back with a small wedge pillow.

**Action:** Gently tilt your pelvis and flatten the back against the floor. Hold for 5-10 seconds and relax.

**Repetitions:** Perform 10 repetitions.

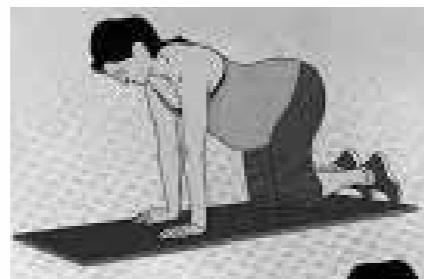


**BIRD-DOG EXERCISE**

**Start position:** Start on hands and knees in a tabletop position with hands under shoulders and knees under hips.

**Action:** Brace the lower abdominals by drawing in your belly button towards your spine, like zipping up a tight pair of jeans without holding your breath. Slowly reach one arm forward and the opposite leg backwards, keeping the back straight. Hold for 5-10 seconds and return to start position.

**Repetitions:** Perform 10 repetitions

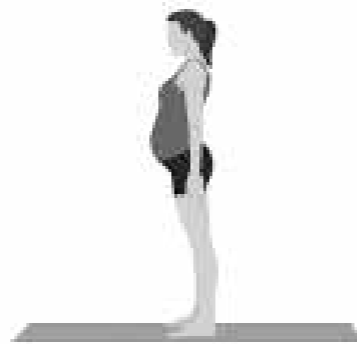


**SQUAT**

**Starting position:** Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.

**Action:** Bend your knees and move your hips backward as if you're going to sit in a chair. Keep your knees behind your toes. Bend only as far as you feel comfortable, then return to the starting position.

**Repetitions:** Perform 10 repetitions



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**POSTPARTUM**

After childbirth, whether you've had a caesarean section or vaginal delivery, physical activity is an important part of postpartum recovery, helping restore strength, improve circulation and support emotional well-being.

Start with gentle activity like walking as soon you feel ready or are cleared by your doctor. Maintain a comfortable pace, listen to your body and gradually increase the distance each week. Short regular sessions (e.g. 10-20 minutes) are more beneficial than occasional intense workouts. Consult your healthcare provider if you experience severe pain, dizziness, heavy bleeding or shortness of breath during the postpartum period. Once again, it is important to drink water before and after activity, maintaining hydration, especially if you are breastfeeding. Exercise won't affect milk supply if you are well hydrated and nourished.

The pelvic floor muscles are like a hammock of muscles at the bottom of your pelvis that supports your bladder, uterus and bowel. Pregnancy and birth places increase pressure on it. Strengthening the pelvic floor helps prevent urine leakage and supports recovery.

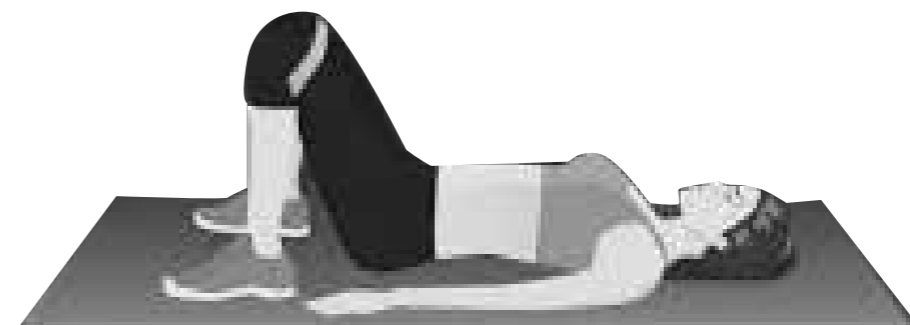
A beginner exercise that strengthens the pelvic floor is provided below.

**PELVIC FLOOR KEGEL EXERCISE**

**Start position:** Lie on your back with your knees bent.

**Action:** Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and stopping the flow of urine both at the same time. You should feel a gentle lift inside the vagina and anus (don't squeeze the buttocks, legs or abdomen). Hold the contraction for 5-10 seconds, then slowly release.

**Repetitions:** Perform 10 repetitions.



Staying active during pregnancy is one of the best gifts you can give yourself and your baby. With the right support and gentle consistent movement, you can feel stronger, healthier and more confident every step of the way.

After childbirth, physical activity supports mothers' well-being, strengthening both mind and body throughout the experience of motherhood. If you are unsure on where to start or need help with specific concerns, consult a doctor, physiotherapist or trained obstetric healthcare provider for personalised support. □

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