

Taking Care of Yourself

Physical Activity

Staying physically active during pregnancy can help you:

- prepare your body for labour and birth
- improve your mood and your energy level
- cut down on backache and constipation
- lower your risk of gestational diabetes
- sleep better

Try these:

- ✓ walking
- ✓ riding a stationary bike
- ✓ swimming or aquafit
- ✓ low-impact aerobics or prenatal fitness classes
- ✓ prenatal yoga
- ✓ canoeing
- ✓ fishing



KEY TAKEAWAY

Choose activities that you enjoy, that suit your cultural practices and that are safe during pregnancy. Aim for 2½ hours of moderate-intensity activity each week, but keep in mind that any amount is useful. Spread it out over at least 3 days or – better yet – do something every day.

Don't try these:

- ✗ activities involving bouncing or fast changes in direction, such as squash and racquetball, for example, can cause ligament injuries more easily when you're pregnant
- ✗ contact sports, such as karate and any activities where you're likely to fall, like skiing, should be avoided since balance becomes harder during pregnancy
- ✗ activities that will overheat you, like hot yoga or swimming in pools warmer than 28°C (82°F)
- ✗ scuba diving



DID YOU KNOW?

Staying active doesn't have to be about going to the gym. You can keep your body moving with day-to-day activities like taking the stairs, raking leaves or getting off the bus one stop away and walking the rest of the way to work.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Find activities you can do with your partner and, after the birth, with your new baby, too.



DID YOU KNOW?

You should be able to carry on a conversation while you're exercising. If not, slow down.

Stay safe when exercising

- ✗ Don't lie flat on your back if doing so makes you feel light-headed or nauseated.
- ✗ Don't hold your breath. Breathe out on exertion and in when you relax.
- ✓ Use light weights, resistance bands and body weight.
- ✓ Drink water before, during and after activity.
- ✓ Stretch comfortably and do gentle warm-ups and cool-downs before and after exercise.
- ✓ Get Active Questionnaire for Pregnancy. csep.ca/2021/05/27/get-active-questionnaire-for-pregnancy/



SEEK CARE

Stop exercising, sit down and drink water if you have:

- extreme shortness of breath
- chest pain
- regular and painful contractions
- bleeding or a gush of liquid from your vagina
- dizziness or faintness

If you don't feel better after resting, contact your health care provider or HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

Contact Physical Activity Services at HealthLink BC for physical activity support during and after pregnancy. Call 8-1-1 or refer to this link for more information: healthlinkbc.ca/health-services/healthlink-bc-811-services/physical-activity-services



TRY THIS

If you were active before pregnancy, continue your physical activity routine but listen to your body. If you don't have an exercise routine, start gradually, with 15 minutes (including breaks), 3 times a week.

Physical activity after the birth

Physical activity can help you boost your mood and energy, help with postpartum depression and anxiety, improve your sleep and strengthen your heart, lungs, muscles and bones. If you had a caesarean, talk with your health care provider about when you can start. If you had a healthy pregnancy and gave birth vaginally, get active again as soon as you're comfortable. Whatever activity you do, start slowly.

Physical activity and breastfeeding or chestfeeding

In rare cases, intense exercise can change the taste of your milk. If your baby doesn't feed as well after you exercise, feed them beforehand. Or pump milk before you work out.

Stress

Some stress is to be expected, but too much can be unhealthy for you and your baby.

To help balance your stress, try:

- ✓ talking with a professional or someone else you trust
- ✓ saying no to extra responsibilities
- ✓ making time for yourself
- ✓ practising healthy eating
- ✓ being physically active
- ✓ making sleep a priority
- ✓ practising relaxation breathing
- ✓ building a support system and making friends with other parents and caregivers
- ✓ taking prenatal classes

If you have a sudden crisis, talk with your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.



DID YOU KNOW?

Pregnancy can cause you to feel more sensitive and emotional than usual. And if you've experienced childhood trauma, pregnancy and labour can trigger memories and negative feelings. Make a clear birth plan (see [Preparing to Give Birth](#)) and talk to your support team about how they can help you feel safe. And take care of yourself by resting, meditating, eating well and staying active.



FAMILY STORY

I found my greatest stress reliever was learning to say no. That and prenatal yoga! Free your life of extra stress and find an outlet to release the stuff you just can't get rid of.

Are you sad, exhausted, moody, worried or crying a lot?

Perinatal depression and anxiety can affect both you and your partner(s). Help is available. See [Your Emotional Health](#).



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Take prenatal classes together. Discuss your birth preferences, your parental leaves and your finances. Listen to your partner's concerns and ask what you can do to help. And remember – you may feel the strain, too. Take time to manage your own stress and talk with a health care provider if you need extra support.

Posture

As your pregnancy progresses, your posture may suffer. By paying attention to how you hold your body, you'll have less pain in your back, shoulders and hips.



TRY THIS

Pull in your stomach (think "belly button to back bone"), bring your shoulders back, straighten your spine and walk tall.

Your stomach

Your abdominal muscles run from your chest to your pubic bone and take most of the pressure during pregnancy. As your baby grows, they soften and weaken under the strain.

Everyday tips:

- Get out of bed by turning onto your side and pushing up with both arms.
- Don't hold your breath when you lift or carry things.
- Don't do sit-ups or other curling-up movements.



DID YOU KNOW?

If you notice a bulging along your middle when you get out of the bath or bed, your abdominal muscles may have separated, like a zipper opening under stress (*diastasis recti*). Most small gaps will heal themselves. See a physiotherapist if you're concerned and avoid sit-ups and twisting your hips.

Your back

Everyday tips:

- Wear comfortable, supportive shoes and loose clothing.
- Stand with your knees slightly bent but not locked. Put one foot on a stool if you're standing for long.
- Sleep on your side with a pillow between your knees. To get up, turn onto your side and push up with both arms.
- When lifting, bend your knees, use your legs instead of your back, hold the item close to your body and don't twist. Don't try to lift or move heavy objects.



HOW TO

Strengthen your back with pelvic tilts

1. Get on your hands and knees with your elbows slightly bent.
2. Keep your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips.
3. Keep your back flat and your head and neck in line with your spine.
4. Arch your lower back while tightening your tummy muscles and bum.
5. Slowly relax and return your back to the flat position.



Your pelvic floor

Your pelvic floor muscles run from your pubic bone to your tailbone. It acts as a sling to support your spine and pelvis, your internal organs including your uterus, and your baby. Good muscle tone is key to an easier delivery and a faster recovery. It also helps with sexual function and controlling the flow of pee.

Pregnancy and birth can weaken the pelvic floor and bring "pelvic girdle" pain to the lower back, bum, sides of hips, perineum and inner thighs. Talk with your health care provider if the pain continues after birth.



HOW TO

Strengthen your pelvic floor with Kegel exercises

1. Find a relaxed position (standing, sitting, lying down or even walking). Don't tuck your hips under or sway your back.
 2. Gently tighten and lift the muscles around your vagina and rectum (above the anus), as if you're stopping yourself from peeing and passing gas. Your upper belly, thighs and bum should be relaxed. Don't do Kegels when using the toilet, which can lead to infection.
 3. Hold the muscles tight for a count of 5 seconds (or 10, once you're stronger). Keep breathing.
 4. Release. Pause for 10 seconds.
- Repeat up to 10 times, several times per day.



TRY THIS

Prevent pee from leaking by tightening your pelvic floor muscles while coughing, sneezing and lifting.

Travel

In the car

- Wear your seat belt.
- Move the seat as far back as possible to make room for the air bag.
- Don't recline your seat.
- Limit your travel time.
- Take breaks to stretch and move.
- Let others drive when possible.

On a plane

- Before you buy a ticket, check with the airline – some won't allow you to fly after 36 weeks.
- Book an aisle seat for easier access to the bathroom.
- Exercise in your seat and walk the aisle to prevent blood clots in your legs.
- Drink plenty of water and bring healthy snacks.



DID YOU KNOW?

You can find current travel health notices at travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notices.



TRY THIS

If you can afford the fee, consider visiting a travel clinic before you leave.

If you're travelling a long distance

- Buy travel insurance that covers pregnancy and birth.
- Take a copy of your prenatal record.
- Look into local health care and the location of the nearest hospital.
- Check for travel advisories. Some areas have illnesses, like malaria or Zika, that are especially dangerous during pregnancy.
- At least 6-8 weeks before travel, talk with your health care provider about travelling outside of Canada. The hepatitis A, meningococcal and polio vaccines may be recommended for pregnant people traveling to countries where these diseases are common. Some vaccines may take several weeks to become fully effective and some may require more than one dose.



Put the lap belt below your belly and the shoulder belt against your chest.

Sexual Wellness

Pregnancy and parenthood may change your sexual relationship, but intimacy doesn't have to end.

While you're pregnant

Having sex is usually fine right up until labour. If your health care provider tells you to avoid vaginal intercourse, you can still kiss, cuddle and have oral sex. But don't let your partner(s) blow air into your vagina (which can cause an air bubble in your blood) and don't have oral sex if your partner(s) has a cold sore, which can give you a herpes infection.

Your orgasm can trigger your uterus to contract briefly, but this doesn't affect the baby. If you're at risk for preterm labour, ask your health care provider if orgasm is okay.

Vibrators and dildos are fine, as long as your health care provider hasn't told you to avoid vaginal intercourse. Be sure they're clean and don't penetrate the vagina forcefully.

Condoms will help protect you and your baby against sexually transmitted infection (STI). Use them if you have a new partner, if you have more than one partner or if you or your partner(s) have an STI. Avoid condoms that contain nonoxyl-9 (N-9).

After the birth

Sex can happen whenever you're healed and you feel ready. For many people, this takes about 4 to 6 weeks. If sex is uncomfortable, try a water-soluble lubricant and plenty of foreplay. A warm bath can help, too, if your health care provider has given you the go-ahead.

You may consider using birth control (see [Family Planning](#)). You can become pregnant again right away, even when you're breastfeeding or chestfeeding. For more information on Sexual Health after Childbirth see: perinatalservicesbc.ca/Documents/Health-info/Newborn-care/Sexual_health_after_childbirth.pdf



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Talk to each other. It may take time for one or both of you to feel comfortable having sex again. Start when you both feel ready.



DID YOU KNOW?

In a healthy pregnancy, having sex won't harm your baby or make you go into labour. But it may prepare you if you're ready to give birth, by releasing hormones that can start contractions.

Not interested in sex?

Intimacy can strengthen your bond with your partner(s), which is good for the whole family. But your interest and your partner(s)' may change. You may feel tired, nauseated or uncomfortable. Your partner(s) may worry that sex will harm the baby or start labour. Either of you may suffer from depression (see [Your Emotional Health](#)).

But remember, intimacy doesn't have to involve sex. You can stay close by cuddling, holding hands or taking a walk together.

If you want to have sex but are finding it difficult to enjoy it, try new positions and activities or

use pillows to make it more comfortable. Wear a padded feeding bra if you leak milk. Boost your interest with exercise. Set aside romantic time each week and try times of the day when you're more rested.

Working

If you're exposed to chemicals, fumes, overheating or other hazards at work, talk with your health care provider. If you do physical work like heavy lifting or if you work night shifts, talk to your supervisor about adjusting your duties.

Whatever your job, eat healthy snacks, drink plenty of water and find ways to be comfortable.

If you stand for long periods:

- shift your weight from one foot to the other
- put one foot on a footrest
- wear comfortable, supportive shoes
- take shorter, more frequent breaks and try to find a quiet place to lie down or put your feet up

If you sit for long periods:

- change your position often
- use a footrest
- get up and walk

