

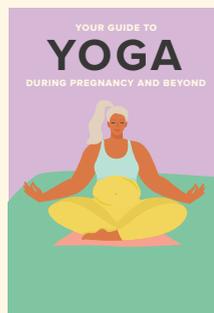
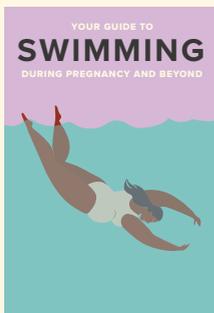
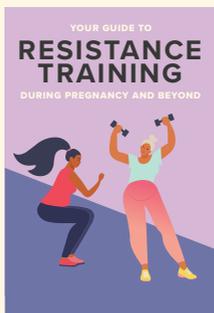
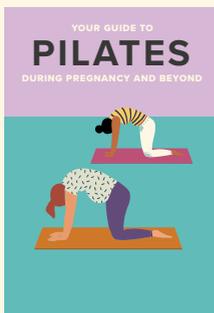
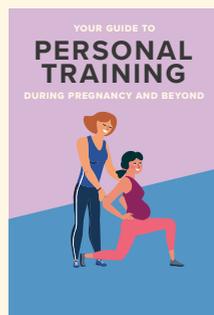
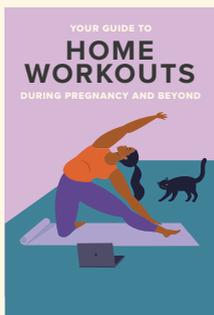
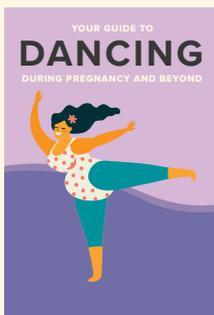
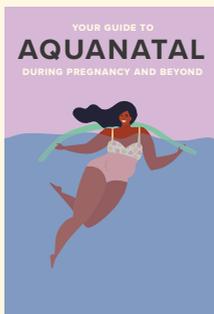
YOUR GUIDE TO

# RESISTANCE TRAINING

DURING PREGNANCY AND BEYOND



## ACTIVITIES COVERED IN THIS SERIES



# ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

It is recommended that pregnant and postnatal women engage in 8–12 repetitions of muscle strengthening activities involving all the major muscle groups twice per week.

Resistance training increases muscle strength by making your muscles work against a weight or force (i.e. bodyweight, gravity or an external load).

Free weights, such as barbells and dumbbells, and resistance bands are popular forms of resistance training, as is equipment such as the weight machines typically found in a gym, e.g., cables, pulleys and chains. Just using your body weight can make for a great resistance training workout too.

Resistance training can be undertaken at different intensities.

For example, low intensity training could include Pilates, or simply walking uphill, whereas higher intensity workouts could include classes like CrossFit® or bodyweight based High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) sessions. When working at a higher intensity, resistance training can also improve muscle endurance and cardiovascular fitness.

**Not active?  
Start gradually!**



**Already active?  
Keep going!**

You don't have to be a member of a gym to engage in resistance training. Small changes such as taking the stairs, or pushing the buggy uphill can be beneficial too. You don't need any special equipment either.

You can raid your cupboards for makeshift free weights e.g. water bottles, cans, etc. If you are new to resistance training, start slowly and with light weights, paying attention to safety and form.

During pregnancy it is especially helpful to build or maintain strength to offset changes in posture, alleviate pregnancy related aches and pains, support you during labour and with recovery after childbirth, and to prepare you for parent life e.g. picking up and carrying children.

# DO's

- ⤴ If you are new to resistance training, start gently with bodyweight, bands, and light weights.
- ⤴ If you are experienced, keep the load under 70% of one repetition maximum (1RM).
- ⤴ Eat well and drink regularly before and throughout the session to prevent dehydration and overheating.
- ⤴ For exercises that require forward flexion at the hips and/or waist, consider alternate positions such as all-fours or seated exercises after the first trimester.
- ⤴ Substitute overhead lifting movements that cause lower back stress with alternative movements.
- ⤴ Switch to dumbbells, rather than barbell work, when the size of your belly interferes with proper barbell technique.
- ⤴ Engage your pelvic floor muscles for support during the hardest part of the movement.
- ⤴ Watch for doming/coning across the abdomen as a sign that you are working too hard.
- ⤴ Keep the load light enough so that you can breathe through the entirety of the movement.
- ⤴ Reduce load to maintain form as pregnancy progresses.

# DON'Ts

- ⤵ Don't modify your movements so that you can lift more - maintain technique even if you must reduce the load.
- ⤵ Don't use a weightlifting belt after the first trimester.
- ⤵ Don't perform bench press or similar movements where you lie flat on your back after the first trimester.
- ⤵ Don't hold your breath whilst lifting weights.
- ⤵ Don't push yourself to your absolute limit.
- ⤵ Don't continue to train through pain, lightheadedness, breathing difficulties, contractions, vaginal bleeding, amniotic fluid leakage, or any other unusual symptoms. Stop and seek advice.

# TOP TIPS

- ★ Weightlifting and strength training are safe and feasible for pregnant women to continue.
- ★ Beginners should consider splitting a full body routine and performing a single exercise for each of the major muscle groups. Start with 10-15 repetitions for each exercise, allowing at least 2-minutes rest between each exercise.
- ★ Pregnancy is not a time to test your one repetition maximum, but you can work to maintain strength, stability, and optimise health.
- ★ Consulting with a physiotherapist who has specialist training in abdominal wall and pelvic floor assessment and rehabilitation can be helpful throughout pregnancy and after birth.
- ★ Be aware that your pelvic floor muscles may fatigue earlier.
- ★ Focus on pelvic floor relaxation after your workout, especially during the third trimester.
- ★ It is easy to trip over weights, plates or bars that haven't been put away, so tidy up as you go and keep an eye out for rogue weights.



# AFTER CHILDBIRTH

Give your body time to heal, prioritise rest and recovery in the early weeks. If you've had a straightforward birth, you can start gentle exercises as soon as you feel up to it. This could include walking, gentle stretches, pelvic floor exercises and exercises that target the deepest layer of the abdominal muscles. If you've had a caesarean or any surgical intervention and/or complications, your recovery time will be longer.

The 6-8 week postnatal check is a good time to discuss physical activity with your healthcare professional. Reintroduce activities gradually and focus on technique, breathing, pelvic floor and abdominal function. You should only return to higher intensity training once you have recovered from childbirth and

in the absence of any signs or symptoms of pelvic floor and/or abdominal wall dysfunction. Consider seeking the support of a specialist pelvic health physiotherapist during this time.

Breastfeeding, when being active at a moderate intensity or when taking part in strength training, is safe and does not impact on breast milk quality or infant growth. Expressing or feeding your baby before training is recommended. Also consider investing in a suitable bra that will give you support whilst training and remember to keep breast pads with you to manage any leaking that can occur.



# GENERAL ADVICE

Ask your healthcare professional about the Chief Medical Officers' national guidance for physical activity during pregnancy and after childbirth.

## DURING PREGNANCY

It's worth noting that the national guidance applies to uncomplicated pregnancies. We suggest taking this resource with you to your next appointment and to discuss your active pregnancy with your midwife or other healthcare professional.

**If it feels comfortable,  
KEEP GOING**

**If it's uncomfortable,  
STOP & SEEK ADVICE**

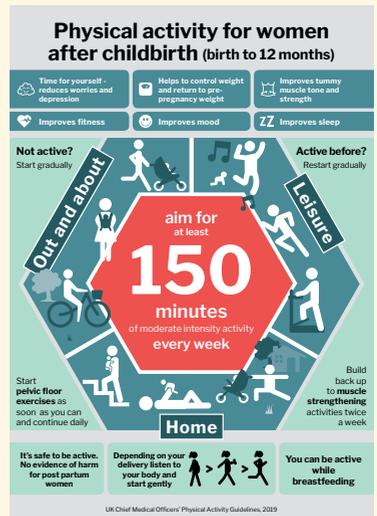


## AFTER CHILDBIRTH BIRTH TO 12 MONTHS

Reintroduction of physical activity after birth should be gradual and individualised.

The 6-8 week postnatal check is a good time to discuss this with your healthcare team, remember to take this document with you.

With any signs and symptoms of pelvic floor and/or abdominal wall dysfunction, more intense activities should not resume and referral to a specialist pelvic health physiotherapist is recommended.



“Being active has many mental and physical health benefits, so as a midwife, I can’t wait to spread the word and share these fantastic resources with new mums, mums-to-be and my professional colleagues.”

Dr Jacque Gerrard, Midwife  
MBE DU<sup>niv</sup> MSc RM RGN



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## DISCLAIMER

Always consult and follow the advice of your healthcare professional.  
This resource does not constitute or replace medical advice.

## CONNECT WITH US



[www.activepregnancyfoundation.org](http://www.activepregnancyfoundation.org)