

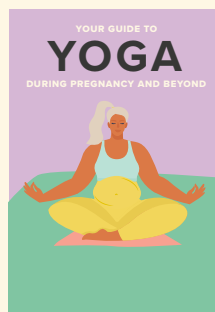
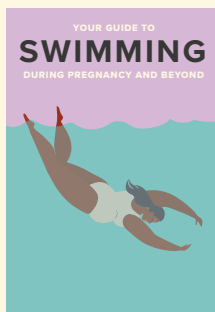
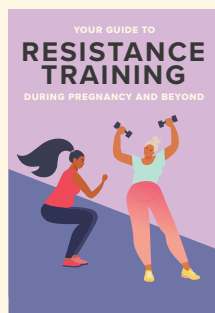
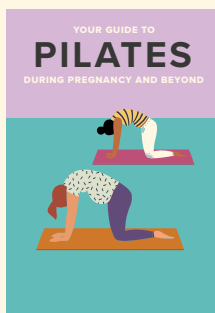
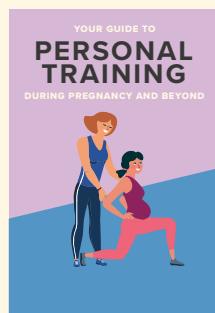
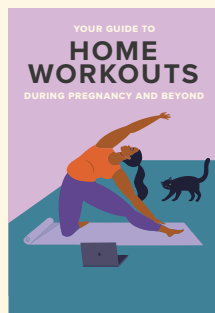
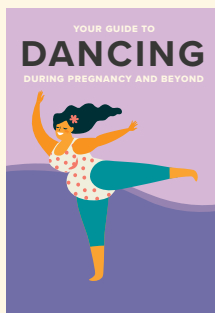
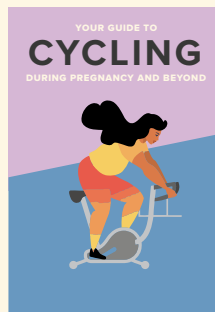
YOUR GUIDE TO

SWIMMING

DURING PREGNANCY AND BEYOND



ACTIVITIES COVERED IN THIS SERIES



ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Swimming is a low-impact activity that is safe during and after pregnancy. If you're new to swimming, start slowly and build up your time in the water gradually.

There are many benefits, including the enjoyment of weightlessness. You may feel lighter and have a greater freedom of movement. Water-based activities reduce pain intensity, and there is less risk of injury, jarring of joints and muscle soreness afterwards. It also helps to reduce swelling, improve the circulatory and respiratory system and lower blood pressure.

We would normally associate swimming with warm, indoor environments, but open water swimming has gained popularity in recent years. Whilst it is not unsafe, it requires common sense, informed and sensible judgement.

Open water or 'wild' swimming can be defined as an activity that takes place anywhere that isn't a swimming pool and includes any outdoor body of water such as a lake, river, loch, reservoir or the sea. Cold water often synonymous with open water swimming and this is an important consideration for women who wish to take it up during pregnancy. For many the absence of the boundaries imposed by a pool (lane ropes, black lines and walls) is both liberating and invigorating. Whether indoors or out, swimming is a great way to be active.

**Already
active?
Keep going!**

**Not active?
Start
gradually!**



DO's

- ⚡ Find a swimming stroke that is comfortable for you – backstroke is not advised later in your pregnancy whilst breaststroke may exacerbate pelvic girdle pain and cause back pain for some.
- ⚡ Check that the water temperature is not more than 32 degrees Celsius.
- ⚡ Maintain a moderate pace that doesn't leave you breathless (if your head was above the water, you would still be able to hold on a conversation).



- ⚡ Take a drink with you and drink small amounts regularly whilst swimming.
- ⚡ Wear goggles as this encourages you to keep your head down promoting a better body position.

INDOOR SWIMMING

DON'Ts

- ✖ Don't continue swimming through pain, lightheadedness, breathing difficulties, contractions, vaginal bleeding, amniotic fluid leakage or any other unusual symptoms. Stop and seek advice.
- ✖ Avoid overheating e.g. hot tubs and spa pools.
- ✖ Do not eat immediately before the class, allow at least 30 minutes.
- ✖ You may also want to avoid tumble turns as this could lead to acid reflux in the mouth and bumping the bump.
- ✖ Do not continue swimming if you feel unwell, uncomfortable, or tired.
- ✖ Don't dive off blocks. It's advisable to use the ladder or steps to enter the pool.

DO's

- ⚡ Always let someone know where you are intending to swim.
- ⚡ Check the weather forecast before setting off.
- ⚡ Be aware of water flow and height.
- ⚡ Limit time in the water or shorten swims to dips during the coldest months.
- ⚡ Enter the water slowly and regulate breathing before setting off.
- ⚡ Get out before you start to feel too cold and don't feel pressured to stay in longer or achieve a greater distance.
- ⚡ Research entry and exit points.
- ⚡ Complete a visual inspection (risk assessment) of the area before getting in.

OUTDOOR SWIMMING

DON'Ts

- ⚡ Do not swim if thunderstorms, fog, heavy rain, or strong winds are forecast.
- ⚡ Avoid swimming alone – swim with a buddy or in groups.
- ⚡ Don't swim near obvious debris, dead fish or in areas where the water smells or appears to be of a poor quality.
- ⚡ Don't swim too far out – always swim close to an exit point/bank/beach.
- ⚡ Don't swim in cold water if you have a cardiac condition or raised blood pressure.

TOP TIPS

INDOOR SWIMMING

- ★ There is no evidence to suggest that you or your baby could be at risk from the chemicals used to disinfect swimming pools.
- ★ Find a maternity swimsuit that you're comfortable in, consider a costume with a built-in supportive bra.

- ★ Warm water will increase your core body temperature, allow sufficient time to cool down after your swimming session.
- ★ Poolside can be slippery at the best of times, but later in pregnancy, as your centre of gravity changes, be extra cautious when walking around the pool and in the changing rooms.

OUTDOOR SWIMMING

- ★ Be visible in the presence of other water users. Wear swim buoys/tow floats and brightly coloured caps.
- ★ Where possible, swim in a designated area away from boats and windsurfers etc.
- ★ Swimming in open water increases your risk of water-borne infections; common symptoms include, abdominal pain and cramping, diarrhoea and vomiting. Seek urgent advice if you develop any unusual or worrying symptoms.

- ★ Consider neoprene gloves and boots to keep the extremities warm.
- ★ During pregnancy your ability to regulate temperature is less effective i.e. you'll get cold quicker, and you'll find it more difficult to warm up afterwards. So, when you exit the water, don't stand around chatting in wet swimwear. Lay your clothes out beforehand in the order that you wish to put them back on, dress quickly and keep a hot water bottle wrapped in clothes/towel. Warm up slowly using multiple layers and warm drinks.

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, swimming should be avoided until any wounds have completely healed.

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 wait until seven days after postnatal bleeding (lochia) has stopped before taking part in swimming or water-based physical activities.

Many aquanatal instructors allow postnatal women to join their class, allowing for

a gentle reintroduction to water-based activities, such as standard aquacise classes or swimming.

You should only return to higher intensity activities 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 swimming is recommended.



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_{niv} MSc RM RGN



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This resource was produced by The Active Pregnancy Foundation in collaboration with Vikki Barrett.

The series of resources has been funded by Sport England and The National Lottery.

DISCLAIMER

Always consult and follow the advice of your healthcare professional.

This resource does not constitute or replace medical advice.

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