

YOUR GUIDE TO

CYCLING

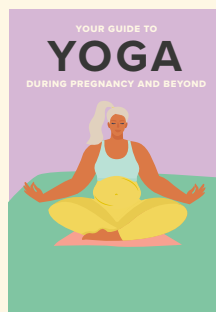
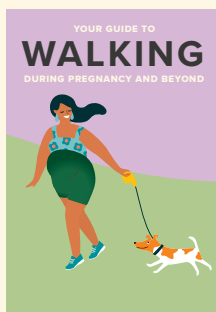
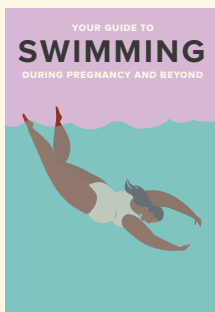
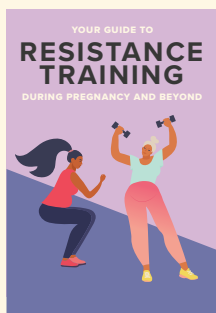
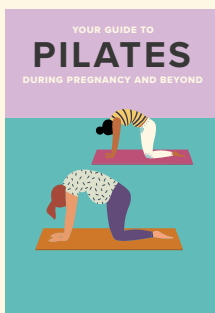
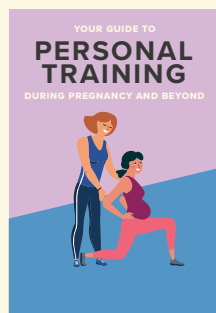
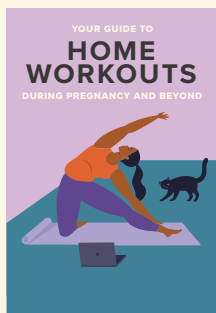
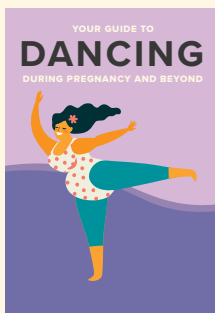
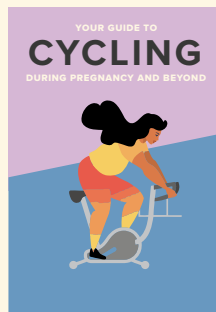
DURING PREGNANCY AND BEYOND



ACTIVE
PREGNANCY
FOUNDATION



ACTIVITIES COVERED IN THIS SERIES



ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Cycling covers a wide range of activities, which include riding on cycle paths, commuting by bike, mountain/cross country biking (cyclocross), BMX track or freestyle riding, but could also involve trikes, tandems, hand bikes and other adapted types of bikes.

Indoor cycling usually involves the use of a stationary bike. This might be in a gym, at home on your own, or as part of a group cycling class e.g. spinning.

It is great cardiovascular activity that builds stamina needed for pregnancy, childbirth and looking after a little one. Leisure cycling and indoor cycling are low impact activities, as your body weight is supported by the saddle. So, it can be suitable for those who are just getting started, or as an alternative to other activities, such as high impact activities like running or aerobics, which could cause discomfort.

Cycling can also be a great way to get outdoors to enjoy nature, fresh air and sunshine. Many places now have bike hire schemes, so you do not necessarily have to own your own bike to take part.

**Not active?
Start
gradually!**

It's important to note that some types of cycling, such as downhill mountain biking or BMX, do carry a higher risk of either falling, or colliding with people or obstacles. 'Bumping the bump' can put both you and your baby at risk, so it's important to be fully aware of this when deciding which types of cycling to take part in.

**Already
active?
Keep going!**



DO's

- ⚡ A growing bump affects your balance and stability, so adjust the bike for comfort. You can raise the handlebars, and/or lower the seat to have a more upright position. Lowering the seat helps you put your feet down more easily when you need to stop.
- ⚡ Wear suitable clothing - consider layering to accommodate for changing body temperature.
- ⚡ Ride with a buddy, let someone know where you are going, and/or take a charged phone with you. That way you can get home if something unexpected happens, like a puncture or if you are feeling unwell.
- ⚡ Eat well and drink regularly before and throughout the session to prevent dehydration and overheating.

OUTDOOR CYCLING

DON'Ts

- ⚡ Don't forget your safety equipment - a helmet is essential. Also, reflective clothing, lights and a bell, so people can see and hear you. Check the bike and test safety features such as brakes to make sure everything is working as it should.
- ⚡ Don't put pressure on yourself to perform at a certain level or keep up with others. Just enjoy the ride and cycle at a level that feels good to you.
- ⚡ Don't keep going if you feel unwell, dizzy or very tired. Slow down or take a break (push your bike and walk if needed). Picking a circular route can be a good idea, so you are never too far from home if you need to end your ride early.
- ⚡ Avoid cycling when it's very warm outside so you don't overheat.

DO's

⚡ Because your bike doesn't move, it can make you hotter than other activities. So make sure you have good ventilation, plenty of water to drink, and wear suitable clothing.



⚡ Take active recovery breaks as and when you need to. Don't put pressure on yourself to perform or keep up with others, just enjoy the ride and work at a level that feels good to you.

⚡ Alert the instructor if you feel unwell, dizzy or very tired.

⚡ Stop and seek advice if you experience pain, lightheadedness, breathing difficulties, contractions, vaginal bleeding, amniotic fluid leakage or any other unusual symptoms.

INDOOR CYCLING

DON'Ts

❌ Don't use the bike if there isn't enough space for your bump (it should not touch the handlebars).

❌ Don't stand up, or do any other movements while pedalling once your bump is big enough to affect your balance (usually around 16-20 weeks).

❌ Don't pedal really fast or really slowly (at a high resistance), instead aim for a pedal speed between 50-100RPM, with a gear/resistance setting where you can comfortably maintain your speed.

TOP TIPS

- ★ Always warm up at an easy level for 5-10 minutes to give your heart, muscles and joints time to get ready for the workout. Then cool down for at least 5 minutes before getting off the bike, to give your body time to recover.
- ★ Ideally, you should cycle at a pace where you can still hold a conversation but can't sing. Cycling at this intensity will improve stamina and energy levels and can boost your immune system, mental wellbeing, and help you sleep.
- ★ High intensity, speed or hill workouts are more likely to make you feel tired or strain your muscles or joints, and it can take longer to recover from these. It is important that you adapt intensity and duration as pregnancy progresses. But remember that every pregnancy is different, so just modify your ride according to how you feel on the day.
- ★ If you're in an indoor cycling class, let the instructor know you are pregnant and ask them to help you adjust your bike. During the class you should modify your effort level by adjusting your own resistance and pedal speed, rather than follow along with the instructor cues.
- ★ Many people find they need to modify their riding for a short time in early pregnancy as rapid changes in the circulatory system can cause tiredness, dizziness or breathlessness.
- ★ You can keep participating as long as you can fit the bike and it feels comfortable.
- ★ Cycling can burn a lot of calories, so make sure you have eaten something within an hour or two before riding and eat afterwards too.
- ★ When cycling outdoors, choose routes that are well lit, have good quality road/path surfaces, and are ideally dedicated to cyclists.
- ★ You should always be alert when riding, make sure you can see around you e.g. tuck hair and headscarves into your helmet, wear your glasses or contact lenses if you need them, and don't use headphones to listen to music or make phone calls.

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 can return to cycling, when it feels comfortable to sit on the bike and pedal for a while. Always start back gradually, building up duration and intensity over time.

If you've had a caesarean, be mindful of the incision site, as your position on the bike may cause rubbing and/or sweat may accumulate in that area, both of which could increase the risk of infection. If this is the case, adjust your position or wait for the site to heal completely before riding.

Whatever your birth experience, you will need to rebuild your abdominal strength

and core stability. Your posture may also have changed significantly, so you may need to adjust your riding position and take breaks whilst building up your strength.

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, is safe and does not impact on breast milk quality or infant growth. Expressing or feeding your baby before cycling 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^{niv} 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.

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