

YOUR GUIDE TO

WALKING

DURING PREGNANCY AND BEYOND

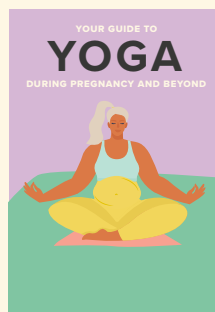
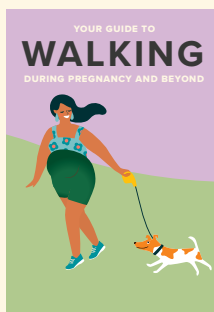
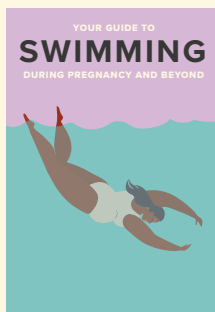
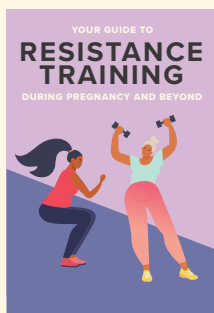
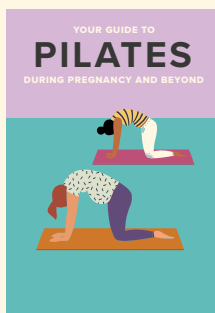
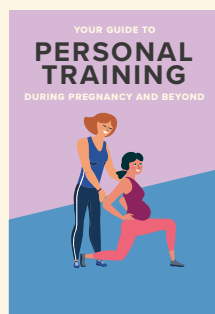
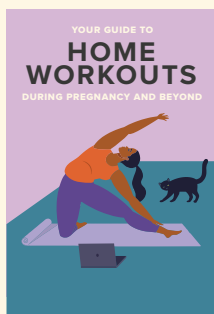
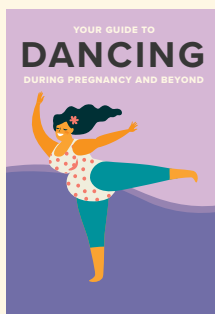
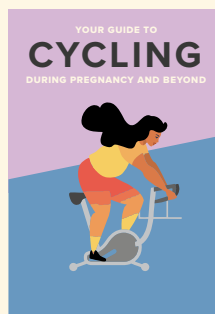
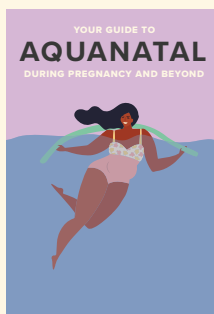


ACTIVE
PREGNANCY
FOUNDATION



**SPORT
ENGLAND**

ACTIVITIES COVERED IN THIS SERIES



ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Walking is the most common form of physical activity during pregnancy and after childbirth. This is not surprising as it is accessible for most people and can realistically be incorporated into daily living. However, walking may look different depending on your ability and appetite for adventure.

Walking is often used to describe the experience of simply being outdoors or moving from one place to another, therefore 'going for a walk' can also include using mobility aids such as wheelchairs or motorised scooters.

If you were not particularly active before pregnancy, walking is the ideal activity to get started. We tend to think of walking as primarily using

**Already
active?
Keep going!**

Walking is a flexible activity that can be done alone or with other people, and at any time of the day. You can walk the same routes all the time (and probably experience them slightly differently each time) or use walking to discover new ways and places. Walking groups are a great way to connect with others through conversation and shared experiences.

our legs and feet to propel us forward but walking is a holistic form of movement that engages the whole body.

Walking supports our physical and mental health in many ways. Research has shown that walking at a brisk pace can decrease the risk of several pregnancy related complications including gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, and excessive gestational weight gain.

When walking, circulation and blood flow to the brain increases and this helps to boost your mood. It can reduce stress, anxiety and fatigue, but also improve self-esteem and sleep quality.

**Not active?
Start
gradually!**



WALKING

⚡ Aim to walk at an intensity where you can maintain a conversation, but can't sing (i.e. "The Talk Test").

⚡ Begin with shorter distances or routes so that you can build up your stamina for longer and more strenuous walks.

⚡ During colder months, dress warmly and cover extremities – hats, gloves etc.

⚡ Wear comfortable, loose clothing and shoes with good grip - consider layering to accommodate for changing body temperature.

⚡ Take water with you and drink regularly to prevent dehydration and overheating.

⚡ Stay on level ground, particularly in the later stages of your pregnancy, as uneven surfaces increases your risk of falling.

⚡ During warmer months, avoid walking in the hottest part of the day, or opt for shaded routes.

⚡ Plan walks that can be shortened or adapted if you feel tired or unwell, or if you are closer to your due date.

DO's

❖ As your due date gets closer, consider routes nearer to home and keep your mobile phone with you.

❖ Wear sturdy footwear with good grip - your sense of balance may shift as your body changes during pregnancy.

❖ Wear and pack layers - multiple thin layers that you can put on and take off easily are better for regulating your temperature and comfort than fewer, bulkier layers.

❖ Consider using walking poles if you're walking on uneven ground.

HIKING

❖ Tell someone where you're going and when you expect to be back.

❖ Eat well and drink plenty before and throughout the walk to prevent dehydration and overheating.

❖ Take a map and/or a charged phone.

DON'Ts

- ❖ Don't overdo it or overstretch yourself - you might have less energy than before you were pregnant so listen to your body and rest when you need to.
- ❖ Don't put pressure on yourself or feel like you need to be out for too long for walking to be beneficial. Short walks are great and easier to sustain, particularly as you move further into pregnancy.

❖ Don't worry about other people's views of what you should or shouldn't be doing in pregnancy. If being active makes you feel good, keep going!



TOP TIPS

- ★ Find local walking groups with people who have similar needs, abilities and desires as you.
- ★ Using apps such as the NHS Active 10 Walking Tracker, is a great way of monitoring your activity and staying motivated.

- ★ You can change your regular walk into a workout by walking with purpose and:
 - > Incorporating intervals
 - > Including body weight exercises such as squats and lunges
 - > Adding weights such as ankle weights
 - > Walking uphill and/or taking the stairs
 - > Increasing your pace
 - > Walking with music or a motivating podcast

AFTER CHILDBIRTH

Following a straightforward birth, you can start walking as soon as you feel up to it. When you're ready, start with short walks around your local neighbourhood, building up to more strenuous walks over time.

The wonderful thing about walking is that your baby can come with you, either in a pushchair or baby carrier. Being outside in the fresh air is great for babies too - they often sleep or are happily stimulated by the sights and sounds of the outdoors.

If you would like to carry your baby, consider speaking with a baby-wearing consultant who can support you to find a sling or baby carrier that works for you and your baby.

Consider walking with someone the first few times you go out. You may feel more confident knowing that someone is with you if you get tired or simply need an extra pair of hands to push or carry baby.

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. It is recommended that you express or feed your baby before going out on a walk. If you need to feed your baby whilst out walking, find a comfortable spot to stop. A suitable bra that gives you support whilst walking is advisable. Also 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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