

Pregnancy Exercise

Interested in pregnancy exercises? Good for you! Pregnancy exercises can help you improve your core strength, tone your muscles and prepare for labor.

This material is from the Mayo Clinic website and can also be found in your Mayo Clinic Pregnancy Book: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/pregnancy-week-by-week/multimedia/pregnancy-exercises/sls-20076779>

Push Ups!



Start your pregnancy exercises with wall pushups, which work the pectoral muscles in the front of your chest wall and the triceps muscles in the back of your upper arm. Stand up facing a wall. Then lean against the wall with your hands. Keep your knees comfortably apart. Place your hands on the wall at the level of your shoulders, slightly greater than shoulder-width apart. Slowly bend your elbows and lower your chest until your chin reaches the wall. Remember to keep your back straight. Then return to the starting position. Gradually work up to 15 repetitions.

Squats



Squatting during labor — even for short amounts of time — helps open your pelvic outlet and allows more room for your baby to descend. Practicing squats now will make it easier to squat during labor. Try squats with a fitness ball.

Stand up straight with a fitness ball behind your back and against the wall, your feet about shoulder-width apart. Slide down the wall until your knees reach a 90-degree angle, being careful to keep your heels flat on the floor. If you can't bend your knees to a 90-degree angle, simply go as low as you can — then return to the starting position. Gradually work up to 10 repetitions.

Leg Lifts!



To strengthen your back and abdominal muscles, try leg lifts. Start on your hands and knees, keeping your arms straight and your hands directly beneath your shoulders. Lift your right knee, then straighten your leg behind you — ending with the raised leg parallel to the floor. Repeat on the other side. Gradually work up to 10 repetitions on both sides.

Step Up



To do a step-up, you'll need a small step stool — or you can stand in front of the stairs. Position yourself near a wall or railing for extra balance or support, if needed. Pushing primarily through your lead foot, lift your body up onto the step. Then step backward to the starting position. Alternate your lead foot each time you step up.

When you're doing step-ups, remember to keep your back straight and plant your foot entirely on the step. Do as many repetitions as you can, depending on your fitness level. Stop when you're fatigued or your form begins to suffer.

Side Plank



The side plank challenges your stability and works the muscles along the side of your body.

To do the side plank, lie on your left side and raise yourself onto your left forearm. Place your left shoulder directly above your left elbow, keeping your shoulders, hips and knees in alignment. Rest your right arm along the side of your body. Hold for several seconds, then lower yourself to the floor.

Gradually work up to 10 repetitions. Repeat on the other side.

Upper Back



You can also do various pregnancy exercises with resistance tubing and a fitness ball.

To target the muscles in your upper back, try a seated row. Sit up straight on a fitness ball or a sturdy chair with your feet hip-width apart and your feet flat on the floor. Place the resistance tubing under the arch of each foot. Holding on to the tubing handles with your palms facing in, pull the tubing straight back with your elbows — as if you were rowing. You'll feel as if your shoulder blades are coming together. Then return to the starting position. Gradually work up to 15 repetitions.

Lower Back



If you'd like to try another exercise with resistance tubing, consider the seated dead lift. This exercise targets the muscles in your lower back.

Sit up straight on a fitness ball or in a sturdy chair with your feet hip-width apart and your feet flat on the floor. Place the resistance tubing under the arch of each foot. Holding on to the tubing handles or to the tubing itself with your palms facing in, lean forward from your hips — bringing your torso toward your thighs. Then return to the starting position. Gradually work up to 15 repetitions. To make the exercise more challenging, wrap the tubing around your hands. This provides greater resistance.