

Focus on maintaining fitness while pregnant

People generally have many opinions about the pairing of pregnancy and exercise. You'll hear different advice from experienced mothers, from books that give general advice and from those unfortunate enough to have a Caesarian section or premature birth.

In my eight years living in Jackson, I have trained 25-plus pregnant women during different stages of gestation. I know more than I ever wanted to know about the physiological changes endured during pregnancy. But I learned quickly that the end goal of any woman is having a healthy newborn.

Expert I am not. I am rather more of a high-level provider of movement training to help keep exercise safe and efficient for the mother and the fetus. The information within this article is based on my experience training women during pregnancy, research and corresponding with local obstetricians. Ultimately, women who wish to initiate or continue a regular exercise program during pregnancy should do so only in consultation with her their obstetrician, midwife or appropriate physician.

Authors from Lamar University published an article in the *National*

Strength and Conditioning Association Journal regarding pregnancy and exercise (February 2006). The two main emphases of an exercise prescription during pregnancy were A) not to make fitness gains but to minimize losses, and B) choosing an exercise mode and program dependent primarily on the woman's level of fitness before pregnancy.

I also emphasize that pregnant women must truly accept that they are pregnant. As a whole, Jackson women strive above and beyond the norm in terms of fitness endurance. However, many women I have trained became mildly frustrated with their quickness to fatigue and/or get out of breath after climbing a flight of stairs. This leads to increased frequency of exercise and intensity that could have a negative effect on the developmental stages of the fetus.

When training any pregnant woman, regardless of which trimester she is in, I introduce or reinforce the Kegel exercises (which are rhythmic contractions of the pelvis floor muscles and the muscles that hold the bladder and many other organs in place). I take it a step further and combine this with the abdominal muscles and glutes to create pelvic bracing.

I have found this extremely helpful to support the lower back and prevent postpartum incontinence.

The exercise is the "one, two" as I call it. Lie on your back, or sit, and contract your abdominal muscles. This is one. This is followed by the contraction of your pelvic floor muscles (the muscles that prevent you from going to the bathroom). That is two. Remember, these two work together but must be learned separately, which helps women to become aware of these muscles to contract and relax during delivery, to develop bladder control and to return the body to prepregnant status.

Even if you cannot feel them working, always attempt them in standing, walking, sitting and exercising ... forever.

I try to make it clear that during training, another goal is to progressively change your thinking of what fitness is. Try to maintain your best posture for as long as possible, delight in little or no low back pain or calf cramping, stretch the upper back muscles and always remember your core. It is my understanding that memory is lost during pregnancy. It seems to be a funny but true joke my pregnant clients tell me.

According to research, another exercise beneficial to pregnancy is swimming. It provides fitness benefits because of the buoyancy of the body in water. Swimming can relieve stress

on joints and the back. This buoyancy causes a centripetal shift in blood volume and a redistribution of extra vascular fluid into vascular space, hence better circulation. Water provides a weightless sensation and allows women whose abdomen size limits their mobility to exercise aerobically in a safe environment.

Training to be Balanced trains clients out of the All Body Therapy Building (the former Teton Rock Gym), which has an indoor endless pool. Andi Lewis, my colleague, is a physical therapist who conducts aquatic therapy for post-operation surgery candidates, older folks and pregnant women to reduce low back pain, or for those who have difficulty doing weight bearing exercises. This pool offers a water current to walk, run or swim against.

The second part of this article will include exercises that Training to be Balanced performs with the pregnant population. The article is scheduled for Jan. 7. In the meantime, Training to be Balanced and I wish all pregnant ladies, as well as everyone else, a happy and safe holiday season!



Training to be balanced

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