

## CAN FITNESS AND PREGNANCY COEXIST?

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**H**ealthy living is always important. But it is even more so when you have another life growing inside of you. Having another life makes your decisions as a pregnant woman all the more crucial. What should you be eating? What foods should you stay away from during pregnancy? How safe is it to exercise while pregnant? Is it possible to stay fit during pregnancy?

All these questions are important to ask yourself to ensure a healthy pregnancy. According to Katherine Barrett-Avendano, D.O., Obstetrician-Gynecologist at the Women's Center in Bellevue, the most important factors to be a healthy mom are rest, nutrition and exercise.

### REST: NURTURE YOUR BODY AND MIND

Physical and mental rest is very important during pregnancy. Physical rest includes sleep. According to Dr. Avendano, eight hours is best for most women. Develop a bedtime routine. Go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day to obtain optimal sleep. Mental rest includes participating in activities that are comforting and relaxing to you, such as reading for pleasure, attending church, meditating or spending time with friends and family. A happy and content mom helps develop a healthy baby.

### NUTRITION

#### How to Deal with the Nausea

The first trimester is very important because vital development takes place with the placenta and baby. Some women may find their first trimester of pregnancy to be difficult due to nausea. Dr. Avendano suggests that if you are experiencing a difficult first trimester, relax and decrease your stress by reminding yourself that the state is only temporary. After 12 weeks, you can usually expect the nausea to subside. You should work closely with your doc-



### HELPFUL WEB SITES

#### American Association College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

[www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

Founded in 1951, ACOG today is the nation's leading group of professionals providing health care for women.

#### Women's Center in Bellevue

[www.thewomenscenter.cc](http://www.thewomenscenter.cc)

The Women's Center offers traditional and alternative gynecology and health care.

#### The Baby Center

[www.babycenter.com](http://www.babycenter.com)

The Baby Center is the most complete online resource for new and expectant parents.

tor to find out what kind of foods will be easy on your stomach and good for the baby. Experiment with types of food, time of day you eat and the amounts of food that will work to receive proper nutrition.

### Vital Nutrients

"A well-balanced diet ensures each piece of the nutrition pie (protein, carbs and fat) is being used for a healthy baby," says Dr. Avendano. In addition to a well-balanced diet, she recommends prenatal vitamins. Key nutrients for a healthy pregnancy are protein, calcium, iron and folic acid, which decrease birth defects. Prenatal vitamins are also recommended because they contain safe amounts of fat soluble vitamins, such as vitamins A and E. Fat soluble vitamins are stored longer and can cause toxicity if taken in excess.

Vegetarian women need to make a conscious effort to consume adequate amounts of protein, vitamin B12 and iron through other sources. Certain combinations of food can provide adequate protein. Some examples are rice and beans or legumes and dairy products. Deep green vegetables such as spinach and kale are excellent sources of iron. During pregnancy your body produces much more blood to support your growing baby. This is why it is especially important to make sure protein and iron are sufficiently included in your diet.

Fish should be a limited source of protein during pregnancy, especially fish higher on the food chain. These fish often have higher levels of harmful substances such as lead and poison. Tuna should be consumed very sparingly because of possible mercury and pesticide absorption. Dr. Avendano recommends no more than one serving of tuna per week. (A serving size is equivalent to a deck of cards.)

It is best to avoid caffeine while pregnant. No caffeine is best, but if you feel you must consume caffeine, keep it to a minimum of one cup of coffee per day. Some safer caffeine alternatives include steamed milk drinks and herbal teas.

### Cravings

During pregnancy, your body undergoes hormonal changes, which make your insulin levels more volatile. Dr. Avendano advises to stay away from simple sugars (for example, soft drinks, candy and bleached white flour foods) to avoid spikes in your insulin level. She suggests carrying snacks such as nuts or string cheese to help suppress any sugar cravings. A regular eating schedule also helps keep insulin levels stable. Most pregnant women do best on six small meals a day.

Almost all women experience cravings during pregnancy. Dr. Avendano assures that if you are eating a well-balanced diet you will be less likely to have unhealthful cravings. A helpful tip she gives in dealing with cravings is to have a glass of water or a healthy snack when you feel a craving and then wait five to 10 minutes. But you can safely allow your-

self to give in to an occasional craving as long as you are eating healthfully.

### EXERCISE

Generally, you expect to gain 20 to 40 pounds during pregnancy but, of course, this varies with individuals. Even with the weight gain you can still exercise and stay fit. Exercise helps to facilitate in an easier delivery and a quicker recovery. According to Dr. Avendano, the best exercise during pregnancy is walking for 20 to 30 minutes a day. Walking moves the sacral joints gently and helps align them as ligaments loosen in preparation for delivery. Your pelvic bone, lower back and legs take the most stress during pregnancy and walking helps to ease the stress during and after pregnancy.

Some women find they wish to maintain their usual high level of activity during pregnancy. Exercise that

is too vigorous can be harmful to the baby—decreasing its growth and development by cutting off the optimal blood flow. Dr. Avendano says, “Listen to your body; if it hurts, stop. If you become breathless, don’t push yourself.”

In the third trimester, you will experience your ligaments loosening in preparation for the delivery. During this stage you should lighten your exercise routine. Your ligaments may not be able to support your normal level of exercise. After the delivery, your ligaments will begin to tighten. Exercise will likely lessen low-back pain.

Each pregnancy is unique. These are general guidelines for a fit pregnancy, but you should allow individual variations. For a fit and healthy pregnancy, it is best to work on these guidelines closely with your doctor through each trimester.