

**WARNING:** Medication mix-ups

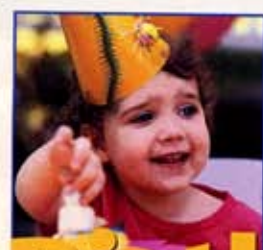
# Parents

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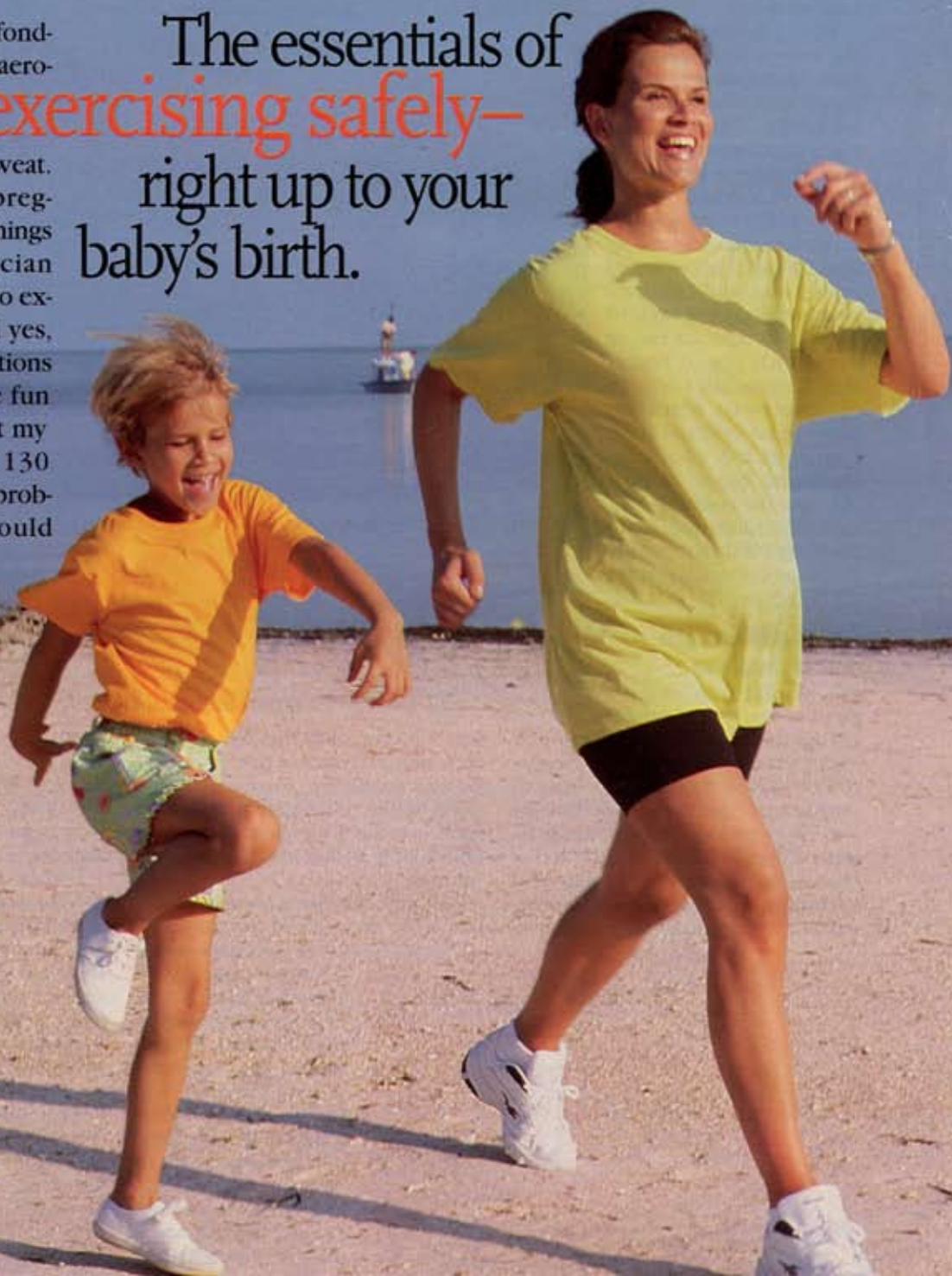
# Pregnancy workout

BY CAREN OSTEN GERSZBERG

I've always had a fondness for fitness—aerobics, tennis, inline skating, whatever made me sweat. So when I became pregnant, one of the first things I asked my obstetrician was, "Can I continue to exercise?" He answered yes, but then added conditions that took a lot of the fun out of it. I couldn't let my heart rate exceed 130 beats per minute—a problem since I never could

The essentials of **exercising safely—**right up to your baby's birth.

Exercise boosts energy and tones muscles—and may even make labor easier.



find my pulse anyway—and I had to give up tennis after my second trimester. After years of a regular exercise routine that kept me fit (and sane), the sudden restrictions were disappointing. I did as I was told, but I was frustrated and not very energized, physically or emotionally, from my prenatal workouts.

When I became pregnant the second time, just two years later, I went to a new obstetrician who had different advice. This time I was told I could exercise at the same level I was used to but to avoid certain sports where falling was a possibility, such as bicycling and inline skating. This sounded reasonable, and I happily continued my regimen of low-impact aerobics and an occasional jog or tennis match; eventually I added a 30-minute swim, which was easier on my enlarged body. I felt great and, aside from my bulging middle, I looked trim. But the conflicting advice was confusing, and I wondered if there was any consensus about exercise during pregnancy.

### Current guidelines give exercise thumbs-up

The verdict is in, and it's good news. After years of debate and study, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has revised its guidelines to recommend regular exercise during a low-risk pregnancy. Proven benefits include reduced discomfort such as that from backache and fatigue, improved circulation, and increased muscle tone, which can help make labor easier. In

**Head for the pool!** Swimming exercises many muscle groups and gives stressed joints a rest while the water supports your weight.



fact, a recent study that followed the exercise patterns of 388 pregnant women found that those who exercised before pregnancy had less discomfort in the first trimester, and those who kept it up had less discomfort in subsequent trimesters.

Although exercise is considered safe in a large majority of pregnancies, there are cases when gynecologists say it should be restricted for health reasons, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or a history of miscarriage. You may need to make some adjustments during pregnancy too, so talk to your practitioner first, and figure out an exercise regimen that works for you. Since fitness

levels vary from person to person, guidelines can be modified to suit you and your body. Remember, the goal is not to lose weight but to condition your heart and lungs and strengthen and tone muscles.

The type of exercise you choose should depend on how active you were before you became pregnant. This is not a time to take up a new, strenuous sport, but rather a chance to keep in shape by doing what's challenging yet comfortable. "It's okay to run when you're pregnant, as long as you're not running to win the race," explains Mona Shangold, M.D., a Philadelphia-based obstetrician and coauthor of *The Complete Sports Medicine Book for Women* (Simon & Schuster). In fact, measuring the heart rate is no longer recommended as an indicator of activity level. "A woman should be guided by her own perceived level

## Danger signs

Listen to your body as you exercise. If you experience any of the following signs or symptoms, stop exercising and call your practitioner right away.

- Vaginal bleeding
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness or disorientation
- Extreme nausea
- Fainting
- A gush of fluid from vagina
- Increased swelling in the hands, feet, or ankles
- Sharp pain in abdomen or chest
- Feeling extremely hot, cold, or clammy

of exertion, and she should slow down when she can no longer carry on a conversation," says Shangold. Bringing down the level of intensity can keep a heavy exerciser from overheating and overexerting her body, which can lead to dehydration and, possibly, bring on premature labor, says Raul Artal, M.D., professor and chairman of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the State University of New York at Syracuse, and author of *Pregnancy and Exercise* (Delacorte). So it's always wise to use moderation.

### Modify your workout

As you work out, look for ways to adjust your activity to a less intense level, says Liz Schneider, a pre- and postnatal exercise and Lamaze instructor in New York City. When Lynne Cohen, of Shaker Heights, Ohio, was midway through her pregnancy, she lowered the height of the step in her aerobic step class. "When my belly grew larger, I became concerned about losing my balance and falling," she says. And when New York City mom Laurie Greenberg was pregnant with her daughter, Jordana, she continued her weight-training but opted for lighter weights with more repetitions to avoid straining muscles.

One exercise that must be modified during pregnancy is sit-ups. Lying flat on your back for abdominal crunches is not recommended, but Artal suggests doing pregnancy-safe pelvic tilts as an effective alternative. Get down on your hands and knees; contract your abdominal muscles and buttocks; hold for three seconds, and then relax, making sure not to let your back sag. (As with all exercise, it's a good idea to start slowly, doing only as many repetitions as you can do comfortably, and work up to more.) "Abdominal muscles should be strengthened during pregnancy in order to support the added weight in front and relieve stress on the backbone," says Artal.

If you're not a regular exerciser, the safest route to a fit pregnancy

## Some important guidelines

Exercise should be challenging but comfortable. Here are some general guidelines to follow for a safe and healthy exercise program during pregnancy. **Exercise regularly and consistently;** avoid spurts of

heavy exercise followed by periods of inactivity. **Avoid brisk exercise in hot, humid weather,** and stay out of hot tubs, saunas, and steam rooms. **Avoid jerky and bouncy motions,** which may strain

the joints and cause pain. **Wear supportive sneakers** and cool, loose-fitting clothing (preferably cotton). **Avoid deep-knee bends** and full sit-ups. **After the first trimester, avoid exercises that require lying on your back** for more than a few minutes. **Always begin with a five-minute**

**warm-up** and end with a cool-down to lower your heart rate. **Get up from the floor slowly** and gradually to avoid feeling dizzy or faint. **Drink water often** before, during, and after exercise to ensure your body is getting enough fluids. **Listen to your body;** stop exercising if you feel any of the symptoms listed in "Danger Signs," on page 68.

is to take it slow and work up gradually. Start with some brisk walking, for example, and slowly increase your mileage. Or consider a prenatal exercise class, in which all movements are tailored to the pregnant body, eliminating jarring or jerky motions. In Schneider's class, for instance, a warm-up is followed by upper-body strength-training using latex bands rather than weights. Then comes lower-body work with squats, pliés, and lunges modified for the pregnant body, a bathroom and water break, and finally some yoga stretches and deep-relaxation exercises.

Some women switch to these classes later in pregnancy, when certain movements are less comfortable and keeping your balance begins to get tougher. Regular exercise classes can also add to the stress on muscles and joints, thus increasing the chances of injury. Stationary cycling and brisk walking are also good options. And swimming offers an ideal pregnancy workout, because it uses many muscle groups while the water supports your weight. Although there is no

hard-and-fast rule about when to stop exercising—many pregnant women safely continue right up to labor—remember to listen to your body's signals. If exercise feels good, it probably is; if it doesn't, it's time to stop or modify.

### Exercise can help the mind too

During her second pregnancy, Laurie Greenberg found herself too busy chasing a toddler to fit exercise into her schedule. "I regretted it," she recalls, "because I had felt so energized every time I worked out during my first pregnancy." It may be hard to find the time to hit the gym, but even a brisk 20-minute walk three times a week can provide not only physical benefits but a real mental boost.

"Regular exercise can give a pregnant woman an increased sense of well-being, put her in a better mood, and improve her body image," explains Maureen Hatch, Ph.D., who led a study on exercise during pregnancy involving almost 800 women, and is currently director of epidemiology in the department of community medicine at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, in New York City. While toned and strengthened muscles help with the physical stress of labor, the breathing and relaxation portion of many exercise classes can also help prepare a woman for coping with the pain. "Women who have more of a mind-body connection have an easier time accepting the intensity of labor pain and not fighting it," says Schneider. "This portion of the exercise routine is also a chance for a mother to bond with her baby and become tuned in to her body."

I'll admit that during those meditative cool-downs, I occasionally fantasized about becoming an oversize couch potato. But I fought the urge, and in the end found regular exercise to be the best way to pamper myself. Now that I spend much of each day chasing a toddler and a preschooler, I'm glad I concentrated on keeping my strength and endurance. I need it more than ever! □

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## 4 great videos

Add some variety to your fitness routine with a video designed just for pregnant moms. All are available in most video stores.

**Buns of Steel Pregnancy Workout** (The Maier Group, Inc.; \$12.95)

**Kathy Smith's Pregnancy Workout** (Kathy Smith Productions; \$29.95)

**Denise Austin Pregnancy Plus Workout** (Parade Video; \$14.98)

**Jane Fonda's Pregnancy, Birth and Recovery Workout** (Warner-Vision; \$19.98)

