Dear Alice,

Can I run when I am pregnant?

Answer

Dear Reader,

If you were a runner before becoming pregnant, maintaining your level of activity, with some modifications, is typically given the green light for active mothers-to-be. To determine what level of physical activity is right for you, it’s a good idea to consult with your health care provider first before proceeding. S/he can help advise on what modifications to add to your typical activities. If you did not run (or weren’t so active) pre-pregnancy, you may still benefit from moderate physical activity during pregnancy. No matter what level of activity prior to being pregnant, following a few recommendations, considerations, and check-ins with your provider can help getting a sweat on safely for both mother and baby!

Being active during pregnancy helps to increase endurance, muscle strength, blood flow, and energy levels. It also helps to soothe and prevent back pain and cramping and helps to deliver oxygen to the fetus. For these reasons, medical professionals usually advise those who are healthy and not experiencing a complicated pregnancy to engage in at least 150 minutes of physical activity every week. However, there are some tips and considerations that come with any workout while with child:

- **Stay hydrated.** Make sure to drink lots of water to remain cool and hydrated, and avoid exerting yourself to the point of exhaustion.
- **Dress for the occasion.** Don some comfortable, loose-fitting clothing for your planned activity. As you pick out your sporty outfit, add a supportive bra to the ensemble.
- **If you’re new to activity, start slow.** While 150 minutes may seem like a lot, it’s good to spread that time out over the course of a week. For those who weren’t active prior to being pregnant, start with easy, low-impact activities to ease into regular activity. Even five minutes a day and then adding five more each week can help.
- **Rest and refuel.** Allow yourself plenty of time between workouts to recharge. As your baby grows, it may push up on your lungs and decrease your normal airflow so check in with how your body feels before, during, and after activity. Also, make sure to get enough calories, pregnant folks need extra calories on a daily basis.
- **Listen to your body.** Stop any activity immediately and seek medical attention if you
experience vaginal bleeding, uterine contractions, chest or pelvic pain, decreased fetal movement, dizziness, fluid leaking from the vagina, calf pain or swelling, headache, increased shortness of breath, or muscle weakness.

- **Pass on workouts when it's too hot or when you're ill.** It's also recommended those who are pregnant avoid working out in the heat or when they are sick or have a fever; overheating may harm the fetus, especially during the first trimester.

Getting active or staying active during pregnancy may require a bit of creativity for effective and safe ways to satisfy your desire for movement. That's another way your health care provider can be of assistance; s/he may advise that you temporarily pass on some of your athletic pursuits. For example, if you engage in a sport that poses a high risk of falling, s/he might suggest you forgo that activity until after the baby is born. Your provider may also recommend that you go through the motions on level terrain (or a treadmill) and avoid high-impact jumping and sprinting during your third trimester. This is advised not only to protect the baby, but to take your joints into consideration as well because they're much more prone to injury during pregnancy. You may also want to avoid any activity that involves lying on your back after your first trimester. Walking, dancing, yoga, and swimming are particularly popular low-impact exercises for pregnant women. Stretching and breathing exercises are also beneficial in increasing stamina and flexibility. Another beneficial activity to take on during pregnancy is **Kegel exercises** [2], which can strengthen the pelvic floor, and in turn, lower the rate of stress urinary incontinence (leaky bladder).

Staying active through pregnancy and after the baby is born also has its benefits. Taking the baby out for a stroll can serve a few purposes. For mom, it can help stabilize mood, and help the body return back to its pre-pregnancy shape sooner; for both: it can provide a lovely bonding session!

Alice!

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