

Pregnancy & Jazzercise By Deb Bucci, BSN, MS

The benefits of exercise continue during pregnancy. Physicians recognize that continuing to exercise during a healthy pregnancy can:

- Reduce backache, headache, swelling
- Improve mood
- Improve posture
- Control weight gain
- Promote muscle strength and endurance
- Promote sleep

With physician approval, exercisers can continue to enjoy these benefits well into their pregnancies. To ensure that they exercise safely and effectively, they should be aware of the following changes and needs that develop within their bodies.

Physiological Changes in Pregnancy

The cardiovascular (CV) and musculoskeletal systems in the woman's body are the most affected during pregnancy.

Cardiovascular Changes

Cardiovascular changes occur in several ways. There is an increase in total blood volume of 50% by the end of the third trimester, the bulk of which occurs during the initial weeks of pregnancy. Accompanying this is an increase of 10-15 beats per minute in the resting heart rate and an increase in the amount of blood the heart pumps per beat.

The implication to the Jazzerciser is that the CV changes listed, along with increasing body weight, puts a much higher demand on the heart to meet the oxygen needs of daily life as well as exercise. This increased workload on the heart leads to a decreased ability of the pregnant woman to exercise at the same level of intensity she previously enjoyed.

Musculoskeletal Changes

The spine undergoes changes in its natural curvature. The enlarging uterus leads to an increased lordosis (swayback), and enlarging breasts lead to an increased kyphosis (rounded shoulders). These conditions alter the center of gravity and lead to potential lower back pain.

Additionally, the pregnancy hormones, relaxin and progesterone, act to soften the ligaments that surround the joints of the pelvic region. This softening makes these joints very flexible, and the potential of injury exists in these very mobile joints.

Nutritional Needs

Pregnant women require an additional 300 calories per day to meet the increased metabolic needs. Research has shown that these additional calories need to be in the form of complex carbohydrates, which are the fetus' primary energy source.

Tips for Pregnant Exercisers

1. Warm-Up

- Take special care to warm up slowly – heart rate is already higher than pre-pregnancy levels.
- Watch your posture – keep movements smooth and controlled.

2. Aerobic Segment

- Monitor your intensity with the Perceived Exertion Chart and the talk test. Pace yourself accordingly.
- The change in weight distribution alters balance. Incorporate modifications using Simply•Lite movements.
- Flexible joints will not handle large and impact moves well. Modify the movements.
- Wear comfortable and supportive attire and footwear.
- Heat production increases during pregnancy. Avoid exercising on hot, humid days. Drink 6-8 oz. of water every 20 minutes while exercising.
- If using a step, reduce the height as pregnancy progresses and weight increases. Or, eliminate the step.
- Avoid circuit classes.

3. Muscle Strength Training

- The pre-pregnancy abilities and the amount of weight gain will determine the amount of weight you can safely lift.
- Stand, sit on a chair, or use a resist-a-ball. The enlarging abdomen will cause you to alter the position of your body during some movements.
- Watch your wrist alignment. Water retention can cause pain and numbness if the wrist is put in a compromised position when using hand weights.
- Avoid the supine (on back) position after the first trimester (12 weeks). The use of a step as a slant board or a ball are great options for abdominal work, allowing for modified crunches. When unable to do crunches, pelvic tilts are a perfect option.
- Do not use leg weights after the first trimester.
- Avoid one leg standing routines as balance can be difficult.
- If hip adduction/abduction is uncomfortable modify the movements.

4. Cool Down

- Ascend gradually.
- Avoid over-stretching.

Moderate exercise during a normal pregnancy can provide wonderful physical benefits. The goal of exercising while pregnant should be maintaining health and fitness – not achieving new milestones.