

Pilates and Pregnancy

How to Use Pilates to Support a Fit Pregnancy

By Marguerite Ogle, About.com

Updated: November 21, 2006

About.com Health's Disease and Condition content is reviewed by our Medical Review Board

Many women find Pilates to be one of the best exercises to do, both during and after their pregnancy. One of the top reasons Pilates and pregnancy go together so well is that Pilates is great at building core strength. If your abdominals, back, and pelvic floor/Kegel muscles are toned, they will support a more comfortable pregnancy and delivery. Pilates is also famous for helping new moms get their figures back after baby is born!

Another great reason to do Pilates in pregnancy is that Pilates is very adaptable. Most Pilates exercises can be modified as your body and abilities change. The modifications help you keep the intent of the exercise, but adjust the form to work for your body.

Get Good Instruction

First, check with your doctor or midwife.

If you've never done Pilates before, it will be important for you to find a pre-natal Pilates class, or an instructor who can give you a lot of one-on-one attention. It is not recommended that you begin doing Pilates on your own if you haven't already worked with the fundamentals.

Food, Water, and Energy

You are already eating for two, but if you are exercising you are burning more calories and losing water through perspiration. Therefore, you will want to increase your caloric intake and stay hydrated.

Prenatal Pilates is not particularly strenuous, but you will want to make sure to pay attention to your body (and baby) and pace yourself. Your energy levels will be changing and you don't want to overdo it. One clue fitness experts use a lot is the talk test. If you are too winded to talk in a casual tone and tempo, it's time to slow down. Other signs that you need to take a break are dizziness, feeling faint, nausea, racing heart, shortness of breath, uterine contractions, bleeding or leaking fluid, and headache.

As Your Body Changes

As your baby grows your centre of gravity will shift. You may find that you need to be a bit more cautious when doing certain things that you are quite used to doing: getting up and down for mat work, getting on or off the reformer, or working out on an exercise ball. Hormonal changes during pregnancy promote flexibility in the joints and muscles. Women do experience more strains to their muscles and ligaments during this time because their bodies are wisely making them more "stretchy". You will want to be sure not to overstretch. Working in a smaller range of motion is often a good way to tune into the subtleties of an exercise. For example, this would be a good time to work with tuning in to the inner core muscles, breathing well, and gently working with oppositional stretch.

About the Scoop

At a certain point, not too far along, your scoop (hollowing in your transverse abdominal muscles) just isn't going to work or look like it used to. The point will be to keep a definite sense of the engagement of the abdominals and pelvic floor, and do what you can without working too hard, after all there's somebody in there! There is a condition that sometimes occurs later in a pregnancy called, "diastasis", where there is a separation of the abdominal muscles. If you do have a diastasis you will want to modify carefully with your instructor, or pause your Pilates workouts until after the baby is born. Your instructor will tell you how to check for this.

Past the First Trimester

Once you are into your second trimester it will be time to stop doing exercises while lying flat on your back. This is recommended because of the possibility of obstructing blood supply to the baby. It is also recommended that you do not put your feet over your head. That's not to say that you can't prop them up. What it means is that your hips stay down. You will want to eliminate any sharp percussive movements from your routine. An example would be vigorous sidekicks, and of course, reformer exercises with the jump board will be out.

Pregnancy can be a very rewarding time to tune inward and connect with the core of Pilates, the exercise principles: centering, concentration, control, precision, breath and flow (fluidity). Working with these principles will not only enhance your workout experience, but they also offer skills to bring to the birth and care of your baby.

This About.com page has been optimized for print. To view this page in its original form, please visit: <http://pilates.about.com/od/pilatesforeverybody/a/pregnancyBasics.htm>

©2008 About.com, Inc., a part of The New York Times Company. All rights reserved.