



Pilates and Pregnancy

Are you pregnant? Congratulations! As you are finding out, pregnancy is one of the most meaningful and remarkable experiences in a woman's life. Physical radiance, the surge of endorphins and excitement about motherhood are among the most enjoyable benefits. However, pregnancy is also physically and emotionally taxing.

The good news is that exercise can help. Many women with uncomplicated pregnancies can continue exercising at mild- to moderate-intensity levels to help offset some of the discomforts and to prepare for the birth ahead. (Always check with your doctor for clearance to exercise and special instructions during pregnancy.)

What type of exercise can help? Offering a body-mind approach that balances strength and flexibility training, Pilates is perfectly suited to preparing women for labor and a speedy recovery postpartum. A no-impact regime, it places special emphasis on restoring the spine's natural curves (postural alignment) and on improving stability and mobility to areas weakened during pregnancy.

How can Pilates help your pregnant body, and how can you keep yourself safe? Stefania Della Pia, assistant program director and instructor trainer for STOTT PILATES®, addresses these issues below.

Helping Postural Alignment

Throughout the gestation period, your posture changes and the muscles around

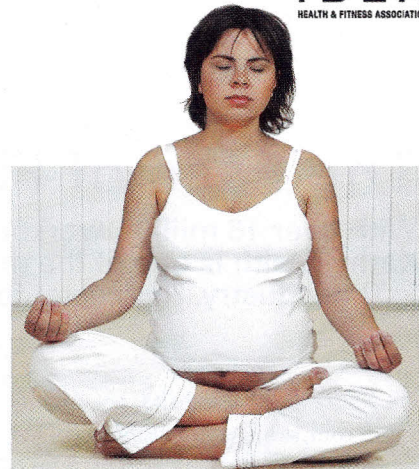
many joints can become imbalanced. This imbalance can put mechanical stress on your lower back, pelvis, hips and feet. The shoulders and upper back begin to round forward; the thoracic extensors (muscles of the upper back) and the scapular stabilizers (shoulder area) lengthen to create an increased curve. Because of this, the muscles of the cervical spine (neck area) become shortened as the head pulls forward and the pectorals (front of the shoulders) also become tight. Lumbar lordosis (an increased curve in the lower back) may also increase, causing tightness and contributing to lower-back pain. Improving postural alignment is therefore a key benefit of Pilates training during your pregnancy.

Strengthening the Lumbopelvic Region

As your baby grows, your center of gravity shifts, affecting coordination and balance. Pilates exercises can enhance these skills without compromising safety. In addition, the hormone relaxin affects the joints and connective-tissue collagen fibers in your pelvis as well as the rest of your body. Relaxin, while essential for allowing your infant to be pushed out during birth, can produce the negative side effect of increased instability in the pelvis. Strengthening the muscles of the lower back and pelvis will help stabilize this area.

Strengthening the Shoulder Girdle

The physical demands of lifting and carrying your newborn will require upper-body strength and stability. A Pilates regime will strengthen the muscles around the shoulder girdle, which is the bony arch formed by the collarbones and shoulder blades. These muscles include the rhomboids, middle and lower trapez-



safe exercise during pregnancy

To make sure that you take a safe, effective Pilates session, it's essential to find a knowledgeable instructor. If possible, it's most helpful to take private sessions to ensure exercises are properly modified and adapted as your pregnancy progresses. If that's not possible and you have not done Pilates before, taking at least a few private sessions before entering group classes is a must. (Always check with your doctor for clearance to exercise and special instructions during pregnancy.)

When exercising during pregnancy, keep in mind these guidelines from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG):

- After the first trimester, avoid exercising in the supine (lying on the back) position.
- Avoid brisk exercise in hot, humid weather or when you have a fever.
- Avoid standing motionless as much as possible.
- Wear comfortable clothing that will help you stay cool.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Be sure to consume enough extra calories to support your needs during pregnancy.

ius, rotator cuff muscles, middle and posterior deltoids, biceps, triceps, serratus anterior and latissimus dorsi. ■

courtesy of

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