


# Movement throughout your pregnancy

## For Health and wellbeing



Information for patients on the  
Athena Enhanced Midwifery  
Pathway





## Your pregnancy is as unique and as special as you are.

Pregnancy is the perfect time to consider lifestyle changes for a healthier pregnancy for you and your baby. Regular, moderate movement of your body is encouraged to help you stay healthy and adapt to your changing body.

### Benefits of Movement

- Improves your mood, reduces stress and helps prevent and treat depression and anxiety.
- Helps you get a better night's sleep and gives you more energy.
- Can help your baby engage into an ideal position for the labour and birth.
- Makes you less likely to develop gestational diabetes (diabetes related to pregnancy).
- Helps to prevent unnecessary weight gain during pregnancy.
- Improves the fitness of the heart and lungs, which need to work harder when you're pregnant.
- Reduces the risk of blood pressure problems.
- It is a good way to spend time with friends and family, which is important for a healthy and happy lifestyle.

***Most importantly, there is no evidence that doing moderate physical activity causes any harm to you or your baby.***

## What is Physical Activity and what is counted as moderate?

Anything that makes you breathe faster whilst still being able to hold conversation would be classed as **MODERATE** activity.

### Movement/ Activity Examples:

- Brisk walking
- Housework/Gardening
- Taking the stairs
- Dancing
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Jogging
- Yoga/Pilates – special benefits of helping to tone targeted core muscles for a smoother labour and can be very relaxing.

*Not Active?... Start moving gradually.*

This is the ideal time for you to begin! **START GRADUALLY.** Build up your activity level in small 10-minute bouts. Start small and build up. Find something you enjoy and stick with it.

Brisk walking is an ideal starting movement for your body in pregnancy that you can build into your everyday routine.

### Here are some ideas:

- Walking to the shops for light shopping rather than driving.
- Walking the children to school.
- Taking a short walk at lunchtime or going for a gentle swim.
- Taking the stairs rather than the lift.
- Joining a pregnancy exercise class

As your pregnancy fitness increases, aim to walk a little further and enjoy the activity for longer. Getting out in the fresh air or listening to music can bring more health benefits for the mind and body.

If you are not used to being active, there are a few activities that are less suitable for you to start for the first time in pregnancy, due to the intensity. Examples include:

- Strenuous strength training
- High intensity racquet sports such as squash

### *I'm Already Active!*

Great ... **KEEP GOING!**

If you are used to being active, try to maintain your physical activity levels. However, you may find that you have to adapt or change certain activities during your pregnancy. For example, replacing strenuous strength training with a body weight exercise class like Yoga or Pilates. Remember to find something you enjoy.

## How much activity should I be doing?

You should aim to be doing **150 minutes of moderate** activity each week. The advice is the same if you are pregnant as when you are not pregnant.

### Although this may sound like a lot, it's important to remember:

You don't have to achieve this level straight away-start gradually. Your levels can be built up over many weeks. Even a small increase in the amount of activity can make a **BIG** difference to your health. Something is better than nothing and **EVERY** activity helps.

- Activity can be broken down into just 10- minute bouts throughout the day. You will soon find it builds up over the week. It could be two ten-minute sessions every week to start with, building up to five 30-minute sessions weekly. Sometimes you'll have a bit more time and energy than others so you can plan your activity into your week.

*"Listen to your body and adapt."*

Whatever you chose to do, you'll need to listen to your body and adapt your activity as your pregnancy progresses. For example, if you were running earlier in your pregnancy, you might need to slow to a light jog or a brisk walk as the pregnancy progresses. Swimming is a helpful activity, especially towards the end of your pregnancy, as it makes you feel weightless and can help reduce the pressure on your joints.

## ***DON'T BUMP THE BUMP***

### **What should I avoid?**

- Avoid contact sport or sports where there is a high risk of falls or injury, even if you were doing these before you were pregnant. This includes skiing, water skiing, off-road cycling, and horse riding.
- You should avoid scuba diving or exercising at an altitude of over 2,000 metres.
- Avoid overheating and very vigorous activity. It is not recommended to exercise for more than 45 minutes, especially in hot, humid conditions.
- Avoid lying flat on your back as your pregnancy progresses, as this could reduce the blood supply returning to your heart from the uterus, putting pressure on the blood vessels. If you go to an activity class, ensure you inform the instructor so they can advise alternative positions to lying flat.
- Be aware that pregnancy can alter your centre of balance and increases your chances of falls, so you might need additional support while stretching or doing balance type activities.

## Do I need any special equipment?

### NO!

It is important to stay cool; wear loose and comfortable clothing. Keep well hydrated – remember to carry water with you. As your breasts increase in size in pregnancy, you'll find a well fitted, supportive bra makes activity more comfortable.

## When should I stop exercising?

**If it feels good, keep going – if it is uncomfortable, stop and seek advice.**

If an activity is uncomfortable, slow down and take a break and see if you feel better. If you don't, stop the activity and seek medical advice. This is especially important if you notice that you're very breathless without any activity or with minimal activity, or you have chest pains, severe headaches, dizziness, muscle weakness, calf swelling or pain.

If you have a medical condition or are diagnosed with any complications during your pregnancy, you should check with your midwife or doctor that it's safe to keep doing your current activities. For most medical conditions, light and moderate intensity is still recommended and encouraged.



## How to keep motivated

Staying motivated in pregnancy can be a challenge, especially in the early and later stages of your pregnancy.

### Here are some tips:

- Track your activities using an activity device or in a diary/planner - you will be surprised at how much you already do!
- You can do your activity from the comfort of your own home and build it into your daily routine.
- Share your activity with friends and family.
- Be bold and find a local activity that you enjoy (your community midwife may be able to guide you in finding local classes suited for pregnancy and beyond).
- It can be helpful to set yourself some achievable goals and keep a diary of your activity.

## Further information and helpful resources:



### **Moving Medicine**

[https://movingmedicine.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/03/Pregnancy\\_Patient\\_info\\_leaflet\\_2020.pdf](https://movingmedicine.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/03/Pregnancy_Patient_info_leaflet_2020.pdf)



### **Royal collage of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists**

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information/physical-activity-and-pregnancy/>



### **Active Pregnancy Foundation**

<https://www.activepregnancyfoundation.org/thismummoves-mums>

## **Exciting News for Leeds:**

If you live in Leeds, from Autumn 2023 onwards – Active Leeds are offering **FREE** pregnancy activity classes and use of swimming pools in various leisure centres around Leeds, to pregnant people booking their pregnancy and having enhanced midwifery care through the Athena pathway.

This can be a great opportunity to engage in an activity, have fun and meet other pregnant people.

Please speak to the Athena Midwife for more information on this exciting offer.

**For Further Information, advice and support for healthy living including physical activity, diet and nutrition – contact:**

**[Leedsth-tr.athenaclinic@nhs.net](mailto:Leedsth-tr.athenaclinic@nhs.net)**

**Anna Cockerham, Specialist Midwife Health Equity and Athena Lead Midwife:**

**Tel: 0774 722 1304 (Non-urgent enquiries for the Athena Pathway, available Monday and Thursday 8:30-6pm)**



## What did you think of your care?

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