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Life Style

Multiply the Benefits Exercise During a Multiples Pregnancy

By Melissa Granberry

When you are pregnant with multiples, you can multiply many things: the amount of morning sickness you may have, the girth of your waistline and your abundance of joy. But what about multiplying the amount of exercise you need? Should you double your time at the gym or relax for nine months before the whirlwind of activity arrives?

Is It Safe?

Determining whether exercise is beneficial during your pregnancy may be confusing, according to Dr. Randy Morris, a board certified reproductive endocrinologist and associate clinical professor for the division of reproductive endocrinology at the University of Illinois School of Medicine in Chicago.

What is causing all of this uncertainty? "The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) suggests that women pregnant with multiples refrain from aerobic exercise due to the high risk for potential problems," says Dr. Morris. "This information may be confusing because the recommendation for a singleton pregnancy is actually 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise a day."

Preterm labor is the potential problem that concerns physicians and their patients the most. So how do you determine if your pregnancy is too high risk for physical activity?

The first step is to talk to your doctor. "A woman who desires to stay active should communicate with her physician about her activity level throughout her pregnancy," says Nancy Bowers, R.N., president of [Marvelous Multiples](#) and author of [The Multiple Pregnancy Sourcebook: Pregnancy and the First Days with Twins, Triplets, and More](#) (McGraw-Hill, 2001).

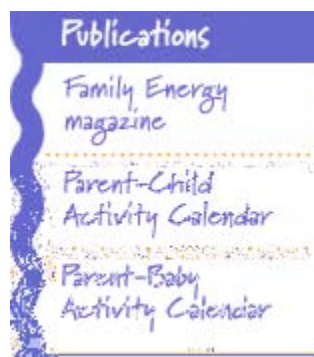
Walking and Wading

If you are given the "green light" by your obstetrician, there are a variety of





activities that you can do to keep yourself fit and feeling good during the nine months of anticipation. "We recommend that a woman continue to be physically active during her pregnancy as long as she was active before the pregnancy," says Dr. Rebecca Moskwinski, executive vice president of the [National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs](#) (NOMOTC). "This is not the time to start a new exercise routine."



"Most women pregnant with multiples do best with non-weight-bearing exercises," says Dr. Moskwinski. While pregnant with her twin daughters, Dr. Moskwinski remained active and continued walking throughout her pregnancy. "However, at the end of the pregnancy, just walking to the kitchen was all the exercise I could handle!" she says.

Stephanie West, from Gentry, Ark., also walked throughout the first half of her pregnancy with twin boys. "During the first four months of my pregnancy, I was attending the spring semester at college," says West. "I enjoyed walking on campus and would recommend any mother continue walking as long as possible."



In addition to walking, Dr. Moskwinski recommends activities such as riding a stationary bicycle, arm exercises and swimming. West delivered her babies in September and was "very" pregnant during the hot summer months. "My doctor recommended that I make the swimming pool my best friend," says West. "It was a great way to cool myself while enjoying the weightlessness of the water."

Bowers says that women with no evidence of complications can enjoy limited walking or paddling in the pool. "Many women find the buoyancy of the water relieves some of the discomforts that come with carrying several babies," she says.

Pregnancy yoga and Kegel exercises are also recommended. "Kegels increase the muscle tone of the pelvic muscles and the circulation to the genital area," says Dr. Moskwinski. "These are especially helpful after delivery."

You should take precautions, however, when exercising while pregnant with multiples. "Refrain from any exercises flat on the back," says Dr. Moskwinski. "Weight training or resistance exercises should also be avoided." Dr. Moskwinski explains that the fetuses have a limited ability to get rid of heat, so exercise should not be performed in hot, humid weather or if you are running a fever. In addition, steer clear of hot tubs and saunas.

Keep the Calories

Have you been counting calories all of your life? Now you can multiply them! The first few months of a multiples pregnancy is the time to focus on weight gain. "I gained most of my weight during the first and second trimesters and only added 6 pounds in the last few weeks," says West. Gaining weight earlier in pregnancy is common and necessary when carrying multiples, but often is not an easy feat when plagued with a double dose of morning sickness.

Of course, to gain weight you need calories, and the more you exercise, the more calories you burn. If you are beginning your pregnancy underweight, keeping every calorie is even more crucial. "My doctor encouraged me to drink Ensure® three times a day to keep up the calories," says Margaret Ward, from Houston, Texas, recounting her pregnancy with triplets.

Talk to your doctor about concerns you have in these crucial first months. Are you

gaining enough weight? Are you able to keep food down? Are you having any warning signs of premature labor? If so, your physician may advise you to minimize your physical activities.

Look Out!

A pregnant woman's body will give her signals if she is overdoing it, and this is especially true when pregnant with multiples. "Stay attuned to your body and listen," says Dr. Ari Brown, pediatrician and co-author of [Baby 411: Clear Answers and Smart Advice for Your Baby's First Year](#) (Windsor Peak Press, 2003).

What exactly are you listening for? Dr. Brown says that if you feel like you are having contractions or feel pelvic pressure you should stop what you are doing. "Feeling lightheaded or having discharge or vaginal bleeding are also warnings," she says.

Swelling is another sign that you may be overdoing it. "The excessive walking I did on campus was causing me to experience some extensive swelling in my feet," says West. "My doctor advised me to take it easy and not attend the summer semester."

West sailed through the remainder of her pregnancy with no complications. "I do believe that 'taking it easy' after my spring semester contributed to my good health," she says. Bowers adds that many women reduce their activity level on their own as they reach mid-pregnancy, simply because it becomes too uncomfortable and their body tells them to rest more.

"Generally, when pregnant with twins, most women should cut back on physical activities at 28 weeks," says Dr. Brown. "When pregnant with triplets, the cut off point is closer to 20 weeks."

For some pregnancies, rest is encouraged almost as soon as the pregnancy test turns positive. Ward was instructed to take it easy soon after she learned she was expecting triplets. "At 19 weeks I was put on complete bed rest," she says. But the resting paid off. Though she delivered the triplets at an early 28 weeks, they are now healthy 6-year-olds attending kindergarten.

After Pregnancy

Once Ward recovered from her Cesarean section, she was able to resume physical activities, which primarily consisted of caring for three newborns. "Once the babies were home, I would put them all in the stroller and take them for a walk twice a day," she says. "I'm not sure if it was breastfeeding three babies or pushing all of them in a stroller, but the weight came off easily."



Dr. Moskwinski adds that women who remain physically active will feel better and recover faster after pregnancy.

Whether you are swimming daily, practicing yoga positions or bedridden on the couch, the most important goal of your pregnancy is to bring healthy babies into the world. Listen to your doctor and be involved in determining the best course of action for you during these next nine months. One thing is certain: After the births, your physical activity will be multiplied!

Dr. Brown's 5 Tips for Physical Activity

1. Get your doctor's approval to exercise.
2. Everything in moderation.
3. If it doesn't feel good, STOP.
4. Stress increases the risk of preterm labor.
5. Drink lots of fluids when exercising.

Yoga Positions for a Multiples Pregnancy

Mark Blanchard, owner of Mark Blanchard's Power Yoga Studios in California and creator of the [Progressive Power Yoga](#) fitness videos, gives the following suggestions for women pregnant with multiples who want to try yoga.

Yoga positions that are "pregnancy friendly":

- ✦ Sun Salutation
- ✦ Warrior 1
- ✦ Warrior 2
- ✦ Half Moon
- ✦ Triangle

Positions to avoid while pregnant with multiples:

- ✦ Boat poses (including Reclining Boat)
- ✦ Reverse Half Moon
- ✦ Reverse Triangle
- ✦ Any positions requiring you to lay on your stomach

Blanchard also says that pregnant women may have trouble with the balance postures, but should try to work them into their routine as long as possible.

Want to see more?

- ✦ [Striving for a Healthy Pregnancy: Prenatal Care for Moms of Multiples](#)
- ✦ [Keep Those Babies in There: Avoiding Premature Delivery With Twins](#)
- ✦ [In the Swim of Things: Aqua Aerobics and Water Therapy During Pregnancy](#)
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About the Author: *Melissa Granberry is a senior contributing writer for [iParenting Media](#).*

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