



Wonder workout for the mum-to-be

While you can't help all the excess weight, you can help yourself by staying fit while pregnant – the benefits are many. Here is an easy and effective routine to take you through your entire pregnancy, by someone who knows what she's talking about! **TEXT: BERNADETTE ABRAHAM;**

PHOTOS: IRFAN NAQI

ATTITUDES TOWARDS EXERCISE during pregnancy have changed dramatically over the years. The stereotype of pregnancy being a time of weakness that necessitates near inactivity has long been discarded. Conversely, many questions and concerns remain for most expectant women regarding the specific 'do's and don'ts' of exercise during pregnancy. As a certified fitness professional and a second time expectant mother, I strongly advocate regular physical activity. Not only does maternal exercise benefit mum-to-be, but it positively impacts the growth of the unborn baby as well. So if you're looking to stay healthy and fit this pregnancy, try this easy-to-do routine specifically designed with the growing belly in mind. Remember to obtain medical consent from your doctor prior to beginning any new activities to ensure a safe and healthy pregnancy.

Are the benefits significant? During the first trimester of pregnancy, it is often difficult to find the energy to get out of bed, let alone exercise. However, going for a walk or performing some kind of physical activity with the little energy I had always made me feel better afterwards. And the reasons are purely chemical – an exercise induced heart rate elevation causes the release of endorphins, hormones that enhance your sense of wellbeing. Not only does exercise help ward off nausea, fatigue, and mood swings, it also helps reduce many of the common pre-natal discomforts felt in the later trimesters like back

pain, swelling, leg cramps, varicose veins, constipation and insomnia. A recent study also showed that women who continued to exercise throughout pregnancy had an active labor that was 30 per cent shorter than non-exercising women, and experienced less problematic deliveries. In fact, there was a 75 per cent decrease in the need for forceps or C-section, a 75 per cent decrease in maternal exhaustion, a 50 per cent decrease in the need for the inducing drug oxytocin, and a 50 per cent decrease in the need to intervene due to fetal heart-rate abnormalities. Exercising women also experience a lower incidence of postpartum depression and return to activities of normal daily life 40 per cent faster than less-active women. Now who doesn't want that?

The exercise routine Postural changes during pregnancy often create muscular imbalances that can lead to pain and discomfort, making it important to strengthen the weakened muscles of the upper back, buttocks, abdominals, pelvic floor, and quadriceps, as well as stretch the muscles of the shoulders, chest, lower back, hamstrings, and calves. The following exercise routine is designed to overcome these imbalances and improve overall muscle strength to make everyday movements more comfortable. It is always a good idea to warm-up for five minutes and to stretch the major muscle groups before and after the workout.

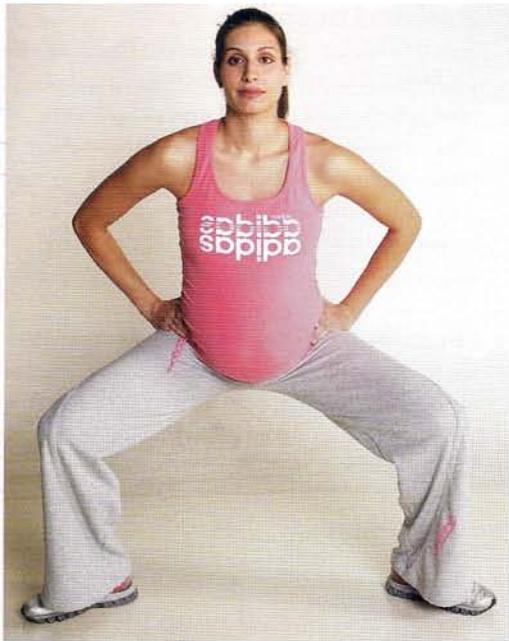
Frequency As stated by the American College of

Sports Medicine, pregnant women should exercise three to five times per week, the same as the general population. Therefore, this routine can be performed at least three times per week on alternate days to allow the muscles adequate time to recover. Cardio workouts like swimming, indoor cycling, brisk walking or low-impact aerobics classes are all good options and can be done on the days you are not strength training. **Intensity** Women who enter pregnancy with a certain fitness level may continue their exercise regimen at a similar intensity for quite some time. It is encouraged to exercise at a level which feels comfortable and does not exhaust the body hours after working out. Listen to your body and stop if you feel any pain or discomfort. It is also encouraged to reduce the intensity level as your pregnancy progresses by either reducing the number of repetitions, the amount of weight used and/or by increasing the time of rest between sets. The exercises shown here are suitable for the second trimester, and modifications for each trimester are mentioned. **Here is a general guideline to follow for each trimester:**

First trimester: Perform 1 to 2 sets of 15 to 20 repetitions; Rest 30 seconds to 1 minute between sets.

Second trimester: Perform 1 to 2 sets of 10 to 15 repetitions; Rest 1 minute to 1 minutes between sets.

Third trimester: Perform 1 to 2 sets of 8 to 10 repetitions; Rest 1 to 2 minutes between sets.



The slide-in plié

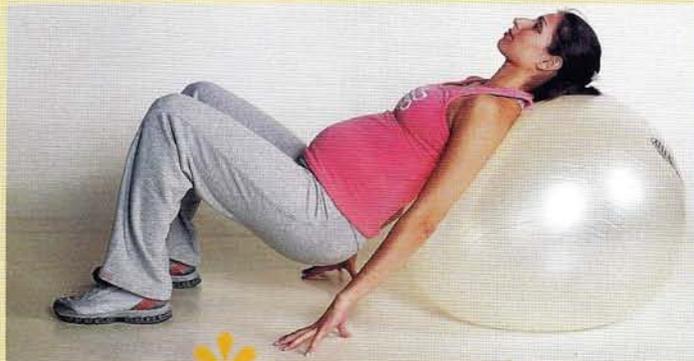
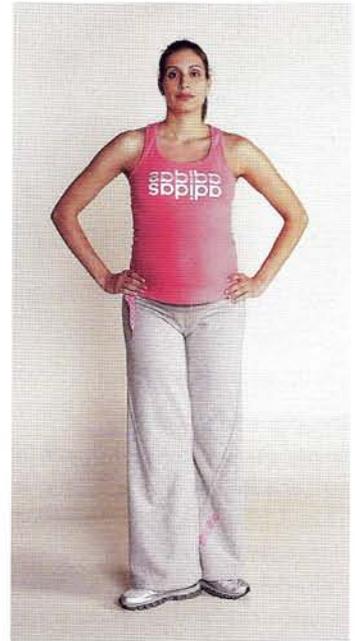
Step 1: Stand tall with your feet a little more than shoulder-width apart, toes turned out, and arms by your sides. Bend your knees, and keep the weight on the heels as you lower to a seated position. Keep the chest tall and make sure that your knees are in line with your heels. Do not allow the knees to bend beyond 90 degrees.

Step 2:

As you straighten the legs, slide the right heel in towards the left foot until you are standing tall. Step out again to starting position, this time with your left leg extended, and repeat the plié. Continue to alternate sides and repeat as many times as recommended.

Muscles Involved: Glutes, quadriceps & inner thighs.

Modifications for 1st trimester: Hold dumbbells in each hand for added resistance; Modifications for 3rd trimester: Hold onto the back of a sturdy chair for extra support and don't lower body as far down.



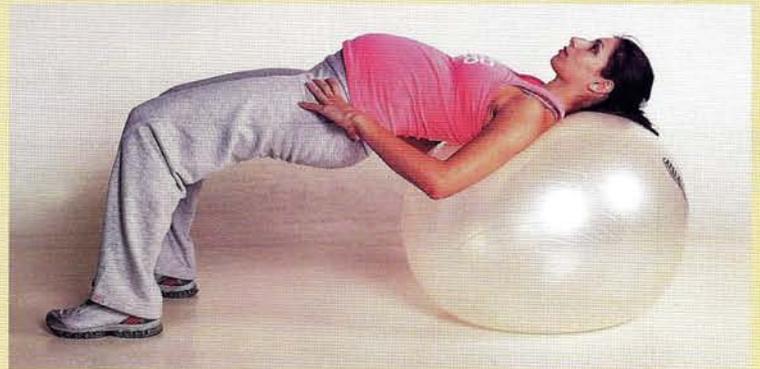
Hip raises

Step 1: Begin by sitting comfortably on the ball with both feet flat on the floor and hip-width apart. Slowly lower your body to the floor by walking the feet away from the ball until your upper back is pressed against the ball and buttocks are a few inches off the floor. Rest the back of your head on the ball and place your hands on the floor to prevent the ball from rolling to either side.

Muscles Involved: Glutes & hamstrings.

Modifications for 1st trimester: Cross one leg over the knee and raise the body using one leg instead of both legs as demonstrated; Modifications for 3rd trimester: Lie on the floor and prop your head and shoulders higher than your belly with sturdy pillows instead of using a ball.

Step 2: Raise your hips towards the ceiling by squeezing the back of the thighs (hamstrings) and buttocks until your body is parallel to the floor. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds and slowly lower the hips back down to start position. Repeat. Note: This is a great opportunity to perform your Kegal exercises to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor. Simply tighten the muscles you would use to stop urinary flow for 10 seconds and release. Repeat Kegals with each hip raise.



The stationary lunge

Step 1: Begin in a lunge position, with the front knee slightly bent and feet shoulder-width apart for balance. Lift the back heel off the floor. Keep eyes straight ahead, shoulders back, and hands on your hips.

Step 2: Bend the back knee and lower the body by placing most of the weight on the front thigh and heel until the back leg is just about parallel to the floor. Push straight up from the front heel and return to starting position. Repeat and switch legs.

Muscles Involved: Glutes, quadriceps, hamstrings & calves

Modifications for 1st trimester: Place the ball of the back foot on a step and hold dumbbells in each hand for added difficulty.

Modifications for 3rd trimester: Stand to the side of a chair and hold onto the back for extra support.



One arm row and tricep extension

Step 1: Stand approximately two feet behind the back of a chair in a lunge position with the left foot forward, front knee slightly bent and feet shoulder-width apart. Rest the left forearm on the back of the chair while bending forward slightly at the hips. Keep the head and neck neutral and back straight. Hold the dumbbell in the right hand with the arm hanging straight down in line with the shoulder.



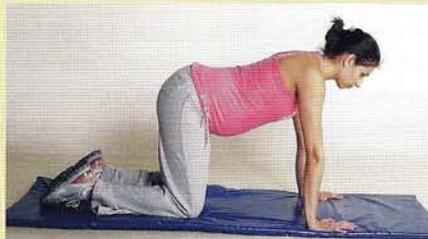
Step 2: Keep the palm facing the body. Raise the dumbbell to your hip by bending the elbow and squeezing the shoulder blade. Hold position for 2 counts and extend the arm straight out behind the body to target the triceps. Squeeze for 2 counts and slowly bring the dumbbell back to the hip and lower the arm straight down to initial position. Repeat, then switch sides.

Muscles Involved: Upper and middle back, rear shoulder & triceps

Modifications for 1st trimester: Perform the same exercise with the body parallel to the floor instead of being at an angle. Place one knee on a bench or the side of a sturdy bed for support while the other leg is straight behind you on the floor.

Superwoman's

Step 1: Position yourself on your hands and knees on a cushioned mat or carpet. Keep your head neutral, back straight, knees slightly apart, and hands shoulder-width apart. Engage the muscles of the stomach to help stabilise the spine throughout the exercise.



Step 2: Lift the right arm and the left leg simultaneously until they are aligned with the torso. Hold for two counts and slowly return to initial position. Repeat as many times as recommended and switch sides.



Muscles Involved: Lower back

Modifications for 1st trimester: Perform the same exercise lying flat on your stomach on a mat or cushioned carpet.

Modifications for 3rd trimester: Lift the opposite arm and leg one at a time instead of lifting them both simultaneously.

BASIC PRE-NATAL NUTRITION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Eat a healthy pre-exercise snack of protein and carbohydrates to keep energy levels high.
- Consume approximately 500 extra calories per day to meet the demands of pregnancy and exercise.
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals throughout the day.
- Drink lots of water; at least a cup for every 15 to 20 minutes of exercise.
- Avoid dieting; aim for healthy weight gain.

WARNING SIGNS TO STOP EXERCISING:

- Vaginal bleeding
- Calf pain or swelling
- Dizziness
- Severe headache
- Chest pains
- Amniotic fluid leakage
- Pre-term labour

Assisted push-ups

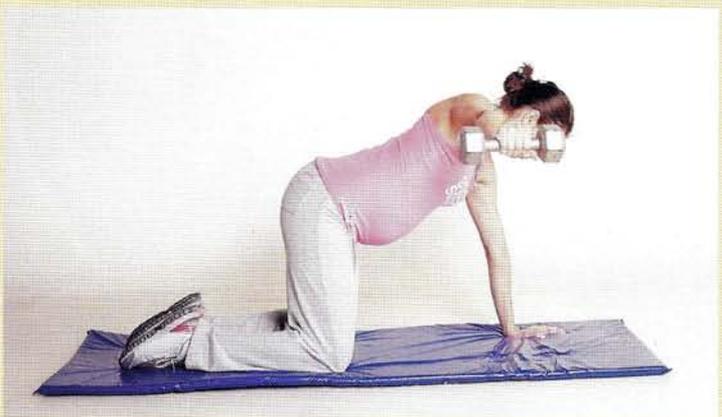
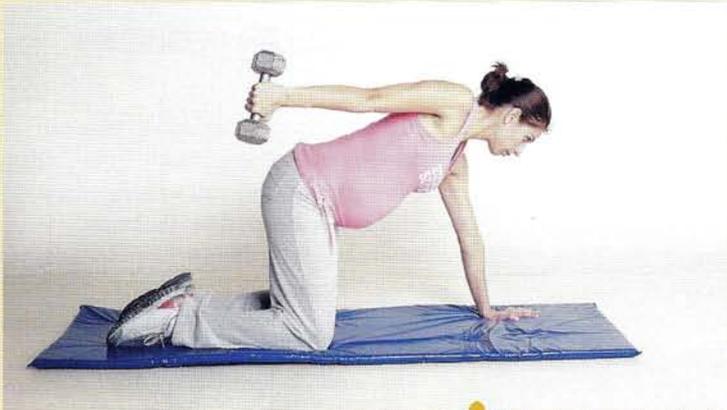
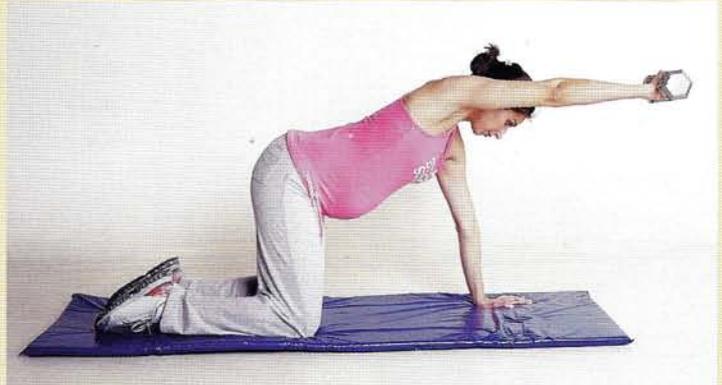
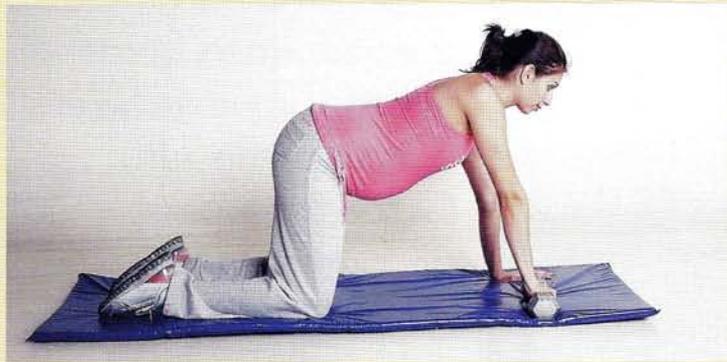
Step 1: Stand facing a wall, around 2 feet away with your feet hip-width apart. Lean forward and place your palms against the wall, arms straight and shoulder-width apart – hands should be at chest height. Form a straight line with your body so that your head, neck, back, and legs are aligned, and keep the back straight and torso supported by engaging the abdominals throughout the exercise.

Step 2: Keep your body aligned as you bend the elbows until they are at approximately a 90-degree angle. Press the body away from the wall up to the point just prior to locked elbows. Pause, and repeat the movement as many times as recommended.

Muscles Involved: Chest, front shoulder and triceps

Modifications for 1st trimester: Perform the same exercise quadruped (hands and knees) on the floor or from the toes for added difficulty.





The ultimate shoulder shaper

Step 1: Position yourself on your hands and knees on a cushioned mat or carpet. Keep your head neutral, back straight, knees slightly apart, and hands shoulder-width apart. Hold a dumbbell in one hand while the other hand lays flat on the floor. Make sure to keep your body weight centered at all times.

Note: If this position hurts your wrist, make a fist and rest on the back of your fingers to keep the wrist from bending.

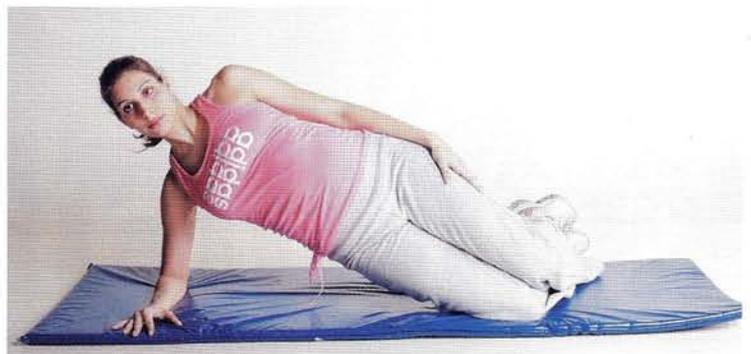
Step 2: Raise the arm holding the dumbbell to the front of the body until it reaches shoulder height. Do not bend at the elbow. Hold the position for 2 counts and lower the arm back to initial position. Make sure the back does not arch when performing the movement. Next, raise the same arm to the side of the body, hold for 2 counts and lower to start position. Finally, raise the arm to the back of the body, hold for 2 counts and lower to initial position. Repeat and switch arms.

Muscles Involved: Front, side and rear shoulders. **Modifications for 1st trimester:** Perform the same exercise in a standing position. Make sure knees are slightly bent to protect the lower back; **Modifications for 3rd trimester:** Perform the same exercise while sitting on the edge of an armless chair.



Side bridge

Step 1: Lie on one side with knees bent at a 90-degree angle, supporting your upper body by keeping the elbow directly beneath the shoulder and palm flat on the ground. Place the other arm along the leg or place it on the hip.



Step 2: Engage the abdominals and use the torso to lift the hips towards the ceiling. Do not let the top hip rotate forward. Hold this position for 5 seconds, maintaining a neutral neck and spine. Slowly lower to the floor in a controlled manner. Repeat and switch sides.

Muscles Involved: Internal and external obliques
Modifications for 1st trimester: Extend the legs to increase the intensity. Make sure the feet and legs are aligned.

To begin your own pre-natal fitness program, please contact Bernadette Abraham at 050-2832020 or by email at Bernadette@mailme.ae