

PREGNANCY STRETCHES

Note: If you have had any recent surgery, muscle or joint problems or are experiencing unusual, specific conditions during this pregnancy, please consult your personal health care professional before starting a stretching or exercise program.

Stretching can be done before and after activity or whenever you feel like it.

How to Stretch:

Stretching should be done slowly without bouncing. Stretch to where you feel a slight, easy stretch. Hold this feeling for 5-30 seconds. As you hold this stretch, the feeling of tension should diminish. If it doesn't, just ease off slightly into a more comfortable stretch. The easy stretch reduces tension and readies the tissues for the developmental stretch.

After holding the easy stretch move a fraction of an inch farther into the stretch until you feel mild tension again. This is the developmental stretch which should be held for 5-30 seconds. This feeling of stretch tension should also slightly diminish or stay the same. If the tension increases or becomes painful, you are over-

stretching. Ease off a bit to a comfortable stretch. The developmental stretch reduces tension and will safely increase flexibility.

Hold only stretch tensions that feel good to you. The key to stretching is to be relaxed while you concentrate on the area being stretched. Your breathing should be slow, deep and rhythmical; exhaling whenever you bend forward. Do not hold your breath.

Stretching correctly and regularly during pregnancy and the postpartum period can teach you how to relax, increase circulation, and relieve many of the discomforts felt during this time.

The dotted areas are those areas of the body where you will most likely feel the stretch.

1

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends avoiding lying flat on your back after the fourth month of pregnancy. Adapt stretches #1-6 by doing them lying on your side, sitting in a partially reclining position, or prop a pillow under one hip.

After stretching or exercising briefly on your back during the first four months of pregnancy, roll to your left side to encourage good blood flow.

2



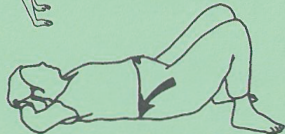
Relax with your knees bent and the soles of your feet together. (Lie with a pillow under your head if you'd like.) This comfortable position will stretch your groin. Hold this stretch for 50 seconds. Breathe deeply.



Interlace your fingers behind your head and rest your arms on the floor. Using the power of your arms, **slowly** bring your head and shoulders forward until you feel a slight stretch in the neck and upper back area. Think of elbows going toward mid-thighs. Hold an easy stretch for 5 seconds. Repeat three times. Do not overstretch. Breathe.

3

Repeat stretch 2



To relieve tension in lower back area, tighten your butt (gluteus) muscles and, at the same time, tighten your abdominal muscles to flatten your lower back. Hold this tension for 5-8 seconds, then relax. Repeat 2-3 times. Concentrate on maintaining constant muscle contraction. This pelvic tilting exercise will strengthen the gluteus and abdominal muscles so that you are able to sit and stand with good posture. Use these tension controls when sitting and standing. Do not hold breath.

5



Next, straighten both legs and relax, then pull your left leg toward your chest. For this stretch keep the back of your head on the mat, if possible, but don't strain. Hold an easy stretch for 30 seconds. Repeat, pulling your right leg toward your chest. Do not hold breath.

6

Repeat stretch 1



Straighten out your arms and legs. Point your fingers and toes as you stretch as far as you can. If you get cramps in your legs or feet, stretch your toes toward your knees instead of pointing them. Stretch and then relax. This is an excellent stretch for the entire body. Hold for 5 seconds. Breathe continuously.

Elevate your legs and feet:



Getting off your feet a few times a day feels good and helps relieve lower back tension. Elevating the feet is also excellent for circulation and revitalization of tired legs and mind. Do not elevate your feet for too long in the beginning. Elevating your feet at a 30° angle is most beneficial because there is little pressure on the lower back and there is less pooling of blood in the pelvic area.