Dear Alice,

Can I run when I am pregnant?

Answer

Dear Reader,

If you were a runner before becoming pregnant, by all means, continue running! Just remember to be mindful of how exercise affects your pregnancy and check in with your obstetrician on a regular basis. Your medical provider is likely to explain that if you exercised regularly before becoming pregnant, you can continue with that activity while closely monitoring how it affects your pregnancy. On the other hand, now is not the time to take on a new high-intensity athletic hobby. If you did not run pre-pregnancy, your doctor will probably not encourage you to begin a strenuous new training regimen until after the baby is born. In general, however, even women who have not exercised at all pre-pregnancy may benefit from moderate physical activity during pregnancy.

Exercising during pregnancy helps to increase endurance, muscle strength, and energy levels. It also helps to soothe and prevent back pain and cramping, and helps to deliver oxygen to the fetus. For these reasons, medical providers usually advise that pregnant women engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. However, there are some requirements that come along with your workout: make sure to drink lots of water to remain cool and hydrated, and do not exercise to the point of exhaustion. Allow yourself plenty of time to rest and refuel between workouts, and stop exercising immediately if you experience dizziness, chest or abdominal pain, or vaginal bleeding.
It might interest you to talk to a midwife or obstetrician about your exercise pattern. You can ask these experts about creative, effective, and safe ways to satisfy your desire for movement. They may advise that you temporarily give up some of your athletic interests?for example, if you engage in a sport that poses a high risk of falling, your health care provider might suggest you cease that activity until after the baby is born. Your provider will also likely recommend that you exercise on level terrain (or a treadmill) and avoid high-impact jumping and sprinting during your third trimester, not only to protect the baby, but because your joints are much more prone to injury during pregnancy. Walking, dancing, yoga, and swimming are particularly popular low-impact exercises for pregnant women. Stretching and breathing exercises are also beneficial in increasing stamina and flexibility.

If you want to be certain that your exercise regimen during pregnancy is completely safe and appropriate for pregnancy, consider taking a prenatal exercise class?not just for the physical activity, but also for increased contact with other pregnant women. You can learn a tremendous amount of important information from the "locker room talk," such as delivery methods, where to shop for baby clothes and equipment, website and book suggestions, and referrals to trusted babysitters.

If you are concerned, it may be a good idea to talk to your health care provider.

Alice!
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