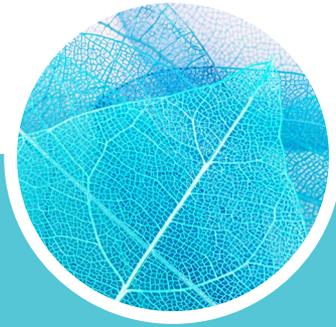


# Exercises — Pregnancy, Labor and Birth



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## Exercises

The following exercises are for you to do now, during pregnancy, but their benefits will last into your labor, birth and recovery. These exercises were chosen because they strengthen and stretch muscles and ligaments that especially pertain to pregnancy and birth. Choose from the exercises in the booklet to make your own workout.

Work up to doing each exercise 10 times a day. Choose an aerobic activity, too, like walking or swimming, and do that 3 to 5 times a week.

**Note: Do not do exercises that are done on your back after the first trimester.**

The first five exercises promote full, pain-free upper back and neck motion, relieve tension, and strengthen upper back and arms — areas where you may be storing tension.

### Neck Circle Stretch

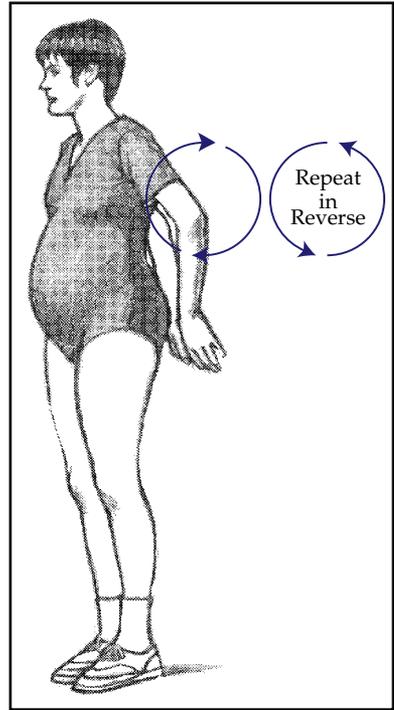
- Sit up straight and close your eyes.
- Let your head fall gently forward with your chin near your chest.
- Keeping your shoulders still, slowly move your chin until it is directly above your right shoulder.
- Lower your head, making a half circle toward your chest until you reach your right shoulder again.
- Repeat, starting at your left shoulder.

### Chin Tuck Stretch

- Pull your chin straight back until you feel a stretch at the base of your skull.

## Shoulder Circle Stretch

- With your arms at your sides, slowly make big circles with your shoulders going forward.
- Reverse the circles.
- Take a deep breath, lifting your shoulders as you breathe in (inhale) and lowering them as you breathe out (exhale).



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**Shoulder circle stretch**

## Shoulder Squeeze Stretch

- While sitting or standing with proper posture, squeeze your shoulder blades together with your elbows and arms at your sides.
- Clasp your hands behind your back and gently lift them up and back, stretching the front chest muscles.

## Wall Push-up Strengthening

- While standing about 2 feet from a wall with feet hip distance apart and back straight, slowly lean toward the wall, allowing your elbows to bend.
- Slowly straighten your elbows as you push out from the wall. You can also do traditional push-ups on the floor — just make sure your back is straight.

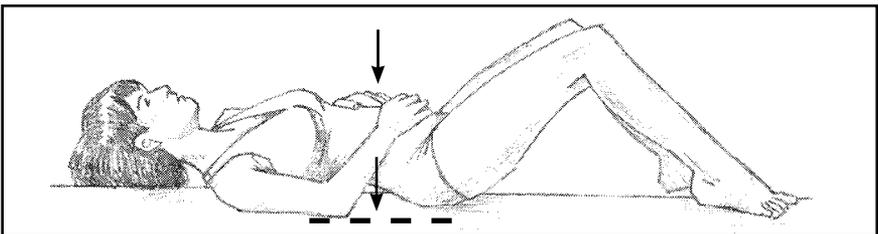
## Pelvic Tilt

To prevent or reduce lower backache, start doing pelvic tilt exercises. This exercise tightens your abdominal muscles and moves your pelvis. The action of a pelvic tilt flattens your back.

During the first trimester, you can do this exercise lying on your back. However, if you begin to feel dizzy while on your back, roll onto your side right away.

- Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor and your knees bent.
- Take in a comfortable breath.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles and push the small of your back to the floor. Hold for a count of 5 seconds. Let your breath out (exhale) slowly when you tighten and hold.
- Release and take in another breath (inhale).
- Rest for 5 to 10 seconds.
- Repeat the cycle 10 times.

If you put your hand under the small of your back, you should feel your back pushing on your hand when you tilt your pelvis.



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**Pelvic tilt**

## **Cat Stretch and Strengthening**

This limbers and strengthens lower back and abdominal muscles, and helps relieve low back discomfort.

- Get on your hands and knees, with your abdominal muscles slightly contracted to prevent swaying of the lower back.
- Do a pelvic tilt, and then slowly arch your back like a cat does when it is afraid.
- If there is a place in your back that feels especially good during this stretch, stay in that position for a longer amount of time.
- Then, bring your bottom down toward the floor and take several slow, deep, cleansing breaths, letting your lower back relax.
- Slowly move back into the starting position and bend at the waist, bringing your right shoulder and right hip toward each other until you feel a gentle stretch on the left side.
- Repeat on the opposite side.

## **Abdominal Muscle Exercise and Strengthening**

This exercise helps strengthen the abdominal muscles and helps reduce the separation between them that sometimes occurs during pregnancy. Before you try this exercise, see if your muscles are separating.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Reach one arm toward your knees as you tighten your abdominal muscles and lift your head and shoulders.
- Put the fingers of your other hand just below your navel.

You will feel the bundles of muscles tighten. If you have a separation of three or more finger widths between the two halves of your abdominal muscles, do not do this exercise or any other abdominal strengthening exercise until after your baby is born.

Talk to your health care provider about this separation. If your separation is less, doing this exercise can help reduce it.

To do this exercise:

- Lie on your back, knees 12 to 16 inches apart.
- Cross your hands over your abdomen so that as you raise your head you will be able to support your abdominal muscles.

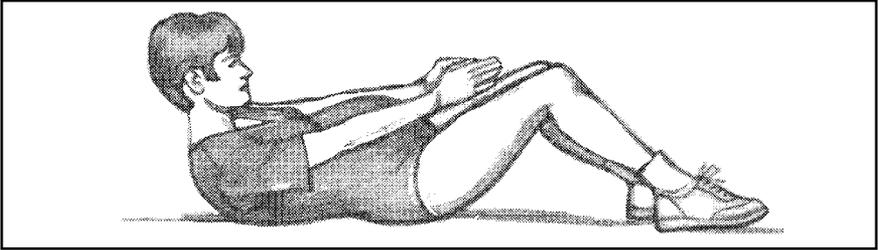
Breathe in deeply, exhale, and raise your head forward to your chest, gently pushing the separated abdominal muscles toward each other.

## **Half Curl-up Strengthening**

Ask your health care provider if you should perform this beyond your fourth month of pregnancy. It strengthens the abdominal muscles and helps prevent back injury.

- Lie on your back with your knees up; do a pelvic tilt.
- Slowly lift your head and shoulders from the floor, reaching toward your knees.
- Raise yourself just enough so your shoulder blades clear the floor.
- Slowly lower yourself to the floor and release the pelvic tilt.

You can also do the curl-up by bringing one shoulder toward your opposite knee to strengthen your oblique abdominal muscles. Roll to the side to sit up when you are finished.



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### Half curl-up

## Spinal Twist Stretch

This increases your back flexibility and relieves tension and discomfort in your lower back.

- Sit up straight with crossed legs or with legs straight out in a “V.”
- Place right arm on left knee and extend your left arm out straight behind you until you feel a gentle stretch.
- Relax your shoulders and take a deep cleansing breath.
- Repeat toward the right side.

## Inner Thigh Stretch

This exercise builds flexible thigh muscles which help in labor and birth.

- Sit on the floor.
- Bend your knees and put the soles of your feet together.
- Pull them in as close as possible without causing discomfort.
- Hold your ankles with your hands and slowly push your knees toward the floor, using your elbows for gentle leverage.
- Hold for 10 seconds.
- Repeat 10 times.



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**Inner thigh stretch**

If you have trouble sitting up straight while doing this, use the palm of your hands, rather than your elbows, to gently apply the stretch.

## Squatting Strengthening

This strengthens and limbers your legs in preparation for pushing during birth.

- Stand, holding onto a table or chair with your legs wide apart.
- Slowly squat down, keeping your back straight and your abdominal muscles tight.
- Hold this position for 1 to 2 minutes, or as long as comfortable.

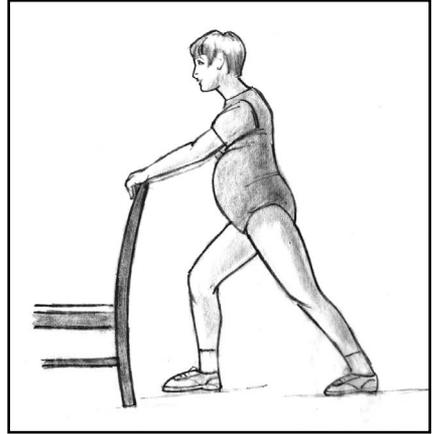
- When you straighten up, keep your buttocks tight, contract your abdominal muscles, and keep your back straight.

You can also do this holding onto your partner's hands.

## Hip Flexor Stretch

This increases the flexibility in your hip muscles, which will help during birth. It also helps promote good posture and prevent low back injury.

- Stand with one leg in front of the other or kneel on one knee, holding onto a chair.
- Move your trunk forward, keeping your buttocks tightened and your back in an upright position until you feel a gentle pull in the front of your hip (of back leg).



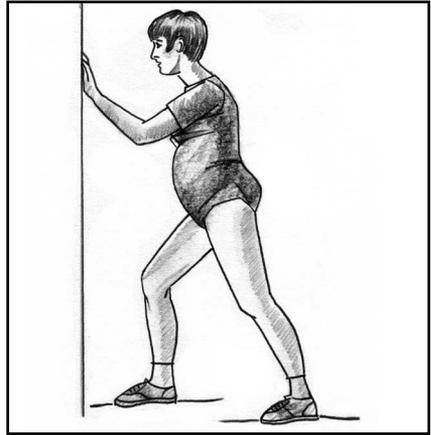
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**Hip flexor stretch**

## Runner's Stretch

This stretch helps relieve and prevent cramps in your calf. Doing it before bed can help prevent cramping at night.

- Stand a little less than an arm's length from a wall.
- Step toward the wall with your right foot and keep your right knee bent. Keep your left leg straight.
- Put the palms of your hands on the wall. Bend your elbows and lean forward over the front leg.
- Keep both heels on the floor.
- Lean until you feel a gentle pull in your left calf. Hold that stretch for the count of 10.
- Switch legs.
- Stretch each leg 5 times.



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**Runner's stretch**



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