

## Chapter 1

# Making Your Pregnancy a Fit Pregnancy

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Knowing what a fit pregnancy is all about
  - ▶ Understanding the benefits of staying fit while pregnant
  - ▶ Discovering how your workouts need to change throughout your pregnancy
  - ▶ Narrowing your fitness goals
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**C**ongratulations on your pregnancy! With a healthy lifestyle and good advice from your healthcare provider, in a few months, you're going to deliver a healthy, happy baby.

To make you and your child even healthier, you're thinking about starting or continuing an exercise program, but you may not know where to begin. Perhaps your healthcare provider doesn't have a lot of experience with pregnant women who want to work out, and maybe your partner (or your mom) isn't so sure that exercising while pregnant is a good idea. The truth is, staying fit during a healthy pregnancy is a *very* good idea, one that's safe for you and your baby and brings both of you all sorts of benefits.

To figure out what sort of exercise routine works for you, this chapter is a good place to begin. It introduces you to some of the basic concepts of a fit pregnancy and answers some of your most important questions.

## *What Does “Fit Pregnancy” Mean?*

In a nutshell, a *fit pregnancy* means that during the nine months between the time you conceive and the time you go into labor, you're doing the following:

- ✔ **You're setting yourself up for an easier labor and delivery.** This is what you've been waiting to hear, isn't it? Women who exercise during pregnancy deliver their babies about five days earlier, spend less time

in labor, experience fewer complications during labor and delivery, have fewer inductions and cesarean sections, and need fewer drugs to relieve pain than women who don't exercise.

- ✔ **You're establishing cardiovascular fitness.** Getting fit while you're pregnant means that your heart and lungs (your *cardiovascular system*) get stronger, healthier, and more efficient. This means that you'll not only be a mother, but also you'll likely live to be a great-great-grandmother!
- ✔ **You're developing strength.** You tone your arms, chest, abdomen, butt, hips, and legs. You may never look like a bodybuilder (and probably don't want to), but you can make yourself strong. This strength comes in handy with all the bending and lifting you'll be doing in a few months.
- ✔ **You're improving your flexibility.** By stretching after your workout and on your days off, you'll become far more flexible, which means that you experience fewer injuries and are far less limited in what your body can do throughout the rest of your lifetime. (Chapter 8 is all about stretching.)
- ✔ **You're balancing exercise with proper nutrition.** Exercise and nutrition go hand in hand; the food you eat fuels your body (doing so either efficiently or inefficiently), and the exercise you do changes the amount of food you need to eat to maintain your weight. This is why you see articles about food in workout magazines and articles about workouts in health-food magazines. The two are inseparably linked. So, this book includes a part (Part III) on eating in a way that complements your exercise routine as well as your pregnancy.

Being fit during pregnancy doesn't mean training for a triathlon or getting certified as a fitness instructor (although if those ideas become future goals of yours, that's terrific). And you don't have to start eating macrobiotic food or anything like that. Instead, a fit pregnancy is about normal people taking seriously the advice of physicians and researchers to get in shape and stay that way.

## Weighing In on the Benefits

One of the most significant benefits of a fit pregnancy is that you gain less fat than nonexercisers do during their pregnancies. And for the weight you do gain (keeping in mind that weight gain during pregnancy is healthy and absolutely necessary), if you're a fit woman, you'll have an easier time shedding your weight after you deliver.



If you're tempted to think of these 40 weeks as a time to throw caution to the wind and eat whatever you want, you'll probably gain far more weight than you need to and will have a difficult time getting back to your pre-pregnancy size. To stay fit during your pregnancy, you have to approach your pregnancy with a different mindset: not throwing caution to the wind, but using common

sense in every decision. You do so by incorporating healthy eating habits and burning additional calories as you work out. (Chapter 9 covers healthy foods for you and your baby. Chapter 10 discusses how many extra calories you need during your pregnancy, what those calories mean in terms of everyday foods, and how many *more* calories you can eat without gaining more weight than your doctor recommends, based on the fitness activities you choose.)

Besides the benefit of managing your weight gain and loss before and after you deliver your baby, a fit pregnancy brings other incredible benefits, from making your pregnancy more comfortable to improving your mood to helping your body get back to normal after you deliver. Even your baby benefits from your workouts. (Chapter 2 is chock-full of the benefits of a fit pregnancy that you and your baby can enjoy.)

## *Finding the Right Activities for You*

If you've talked to your mother or to girlfriends about exercising during your pregnancy, you've probably been inundated with advice about what activities you can do, how long you should do them, and when you should work out, such as

- ✓ “You shouldn’t run while you’re pregnant.”
- ✓ “Don’t exercise for more than 20 minutes at a time.”
- ✓ “Never exercise first thing in the morning.”
- ✓ “Don’t do any outdoor activities.”
- ✓ “A gym’s room temperature is too hot for a pregnant woman.”

So what’s the real story? The truth is that every one of the preceding bullets is false but has a grain of truth in it. For example:

- ✓ If you’ve been running and your pregnancy is going well, you’re free to keep up this activity during pregnancy. Many newcomers to fitness, however, find running to be too demanding during pregnancy. See Chapter 12.
- ✓ Pregnant women exercise for as much as an hour a day and see fantastic benefits, but if you experience any problems during your pregnancy, your healthcare provider may ask you to reduce your duration or to stop exercising altogether. See Chapter 3.
- ✓ Plenty of pregnant women exercise first thing in the morning and love the energy it gives them and the flexibility it gives to the rest of the day. If you’re experiencing severe morning sickness, however, you may not have any desire to exercise until later in the day, when you feel less nauseated. See Chapter 5.

- ✓ Although some outdoor activities are just fine for pregnant women, you may need to modify your outdoor exercise if your activity becomes uncomfortable, especially if the discomfort's due to outdoor weather extremes.
- ✓ You shouldn't allow yourself to become overheated while exercising, but many gyms are air-conditioned, making them ideal for working out during your pregnancy.



You'll get advice from all corners, but the bottom line is this: Do an activity that you like, that makes sense given your current fitness level, and that your healthcare provider approves, and then do this activity in a place and at a time of day that's convenient for you and healthy for your baby.

## *Getting started with a fitness routine*

If you're pregnant and are just getting started with a fitness routine, you're probably feeling a bit overwhelmed about which activities you can do and how you get started: what to wear, when to work out, how often to exercise, how much to work out during each session, and how to listen to your body to determine whether you're overdoing it.

If so, Chapter 5 is designed just for you! That chapter clears the air and helps you get started in your new workout routine — today, if you're so inclined. You also want to take a peek at Chapter 3, which discusses some safety issues, and Chapter 7, which gives you a good look at the various types of workout gear that make you the most comfortable. Then flip to the individual chapter in Part IV that discusses the activity (or activities) you're interested in pursuing.

## *Modifying your routine if you're an exercise pro*

If you've been exercising and aren't sure what you can and can't continue during your pregnancy, take a hike over to Chapter 6 and read all about the ways that you'll need to change your workouts to keep your baby healthy. Chances are you can keep doing your current activity, but with some modification for the length of time you're working out, the pace at which you're exercising, and so on.



Also take a peek at Chapter 3, which discusses the basics of pregnancy workouts. If you're at all gung-ho about exercise and tend to dislike slowing down for any reason, you want to stay especially aware of the warning signs listed in Chapter 3 that let you know you or your baby may be stressed.

## *Working out throughout your trimesters*

Throughout each of your three *trimesters* (roughly three-month time periods by which the length of your pregnancy is measured), your healthcare provider may ask you to modify your workouts in one or more of the five following ways, listed in order from most likely to least likely (see Chapter 3 for details).

- ✓ Move an activity from outdoors to indoors (for example, going from cycling outdoors to riding a stationary bike inside) to minimize the risk of falling; the effects of sun exposure, heat, humidity, or bitter cold weather; and the inhalation of traffic fumes.
- ✓ Change the activity you've been doing to one that offers less risk of falling or is a little easier on your body (for example, from skiing to walking).
- ✓ Reduce the *intensity* with which you're working out — that is, how hard you work out.
- ✓ Reduce the amount of time you're working out (the number of days per week and/or the number of minutes in each session).
- ✓ Stop working out completely and/or go on bed rest in the event of a medical problem.

In addition, each activity has its own guidelines for ways that you may want to modify your chosen activity as your pregnancy progresses through each of the three trimesters. The chapters in Part IV not only introduce you to each type of activity and explain the technique you want to use, but they also describe some common modifications that pregnant women make as they go through each trimester.

## *Turning Your Fit Pregnancy into Fit Motherhood*

After you deliver your baby, you may feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities you face: taking care of your baby, eating right, sneaking in naps in order to get enough rest — plus taking time to work out. If you're not diligent, your workout routine may fall by the wayside as you struggle to keep up with your baby's needs, and as a result, you may lose some of the great fitness gains you've made. You can plan now, though, to not let that happen to you.

Although the subject of *postnatal fitness* (that is, the time after you deliver your baby) could be a book all its own, the chapters in Part V of this book help you find ways to keep fitness a priority in your life, even after your baby is born. In Chapter 18, you find out how to let your body heal from labor (or

from a cesarean section) and do some gentle workouts in the days following your delivery. Chapter 19 gives you tips for squeezing fitness into your newly demanding lifestyle. And Chapter 20 shows you some techniques for keeping your kids fit and healthy — after all, with the loads of news reports on growing rates of childhood obesity, you want your kids to fall in love with fitness at a young age.



The power of exercise and healthy eating can't be underestimated. When you start exercising — even for just 15 or 20 minutes, 4 or 5 days per week — you soon begin to realize tremendous benefits, from having more energy to seeing muscle definition to protecting yourself from serious diseases.