


# exercise is essential



**WHEN IT COMES** to exercising while pregnant, remember your physics: Energy begets energy. So if it feels like even a walk to the refrigerator requires too much effort, get up and get moving. Exercise will help you feel more energetic, better rested and more confident about your physical abilities. It can also keep you from gaining too much weight while preventing aches and pains and improving sleep.

Perhaps most important, exercise during pregnancy also prepares you for the marathon of labor. "It's called 'labor' because it's hard work, so you should be in the best shape possible," says Julie Tupler, R.N., a certified trainer and president of Maternal Fitness in New York.

So how do you go about staying in great shape? There's no magic formula, though the best program consists of cardiovascular exercise, strength training and labor-prep moves (see pg. 98). What's more, you can safely continue exercising much as you did before you became pregnant (barring certain health complications such as persistent second- or third-trimester bleeding, an incompetent cervix or pregnancy-induced hypertension), according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (See "Just the Facts" on pg. 136 for more exercise guidelines.) **By Sarah Bowen Shea**

**Pregnancy should not be a state of confinement. There are a few activities that are off-limits, such as contact sports and scuba diving, but except for those, most pregnant women can engage in the same type of activities they were doing before they got pregnant.**

→**RAUL ARTAL, M.D.** OB-GYN AND CO-AUTHOR OF *EXERCISE AND PREGNANCY*

## get moving

Cardiovascular exercise benefits pregnant women just as it does anyone else. But the added benefits for pregnant women can also be mental. A brisk walk almost always can help you feel better, and knowing that you still have that tool in your arsenal can give you a huge emotional lift.

**Walk, run or swim** > Just make sure you don't overdo it. Decrease the intensity or duration, as needed, to avoid getting overheated. Make sure that you drink plenty of water, even if you swim.

**How often** > You can do aerobic activities every day if you feel up to it, but beginners should aim for at least 15 to 30 minutes three times a week. Advanced exercisers can plan on 30 to 60 minutes.

**How hard** > If you are beginning a new activity, start slowly and gradually increase the intensity as you feel comfortable. Listen to your body and don't push yourself to fatigue.

**Have fun** > Free-form activities like strolling on a beach, dancing and yoga all count as part of the prenatal exercise package. "Pregnancy is an exciting time but also a stressful time," says Lenita Anthony, M.S., author of *Pre- and Postnatal Fitness*. "Activities done for fun can help you relax."

**Labor is like an athletic event, so having good cardiovascular endurance and overall body strength will help you get through it better.**

→ **JULIE TUPLER**, AUTHOR OF *MATERNAL FITNESS: PREPARING FOR A HEALTHY PREGNANCY, AN EASIER LABOR AND A QUICK RECOVERY*

## stay strong

Strength training can help correct muscular imbalance and stress caused by pregnancy. And no matter how big your belly gets, toned arms and legs will always look great.

**Upper body** > It's important to work your upper back and shoulders because the weight of your growing breasts can pull your shoulders forward and lead to back strain.

**Abs** > A strong midsection may enable you to push more effectively during delivery and could hasten your postpartum recovery.

**Legs** > Keeping your lower body strong can help you maintain labor positions more comfortably.

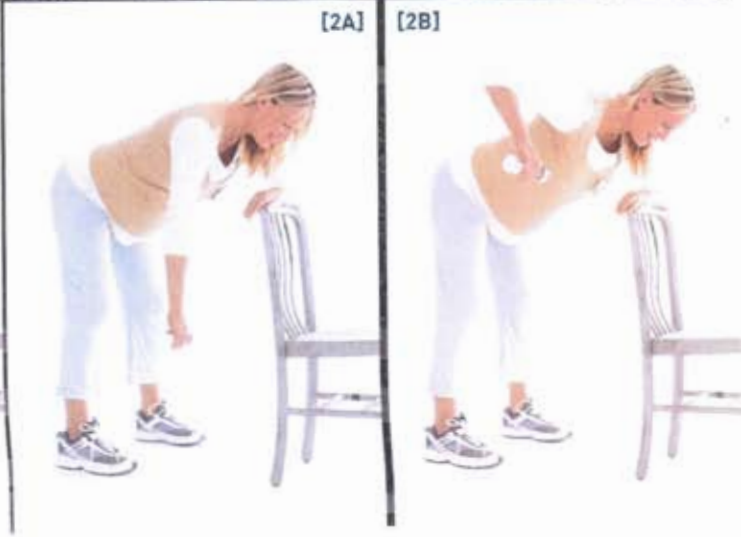
**4 great moves** These exercises can be done throughout all three trimesters with

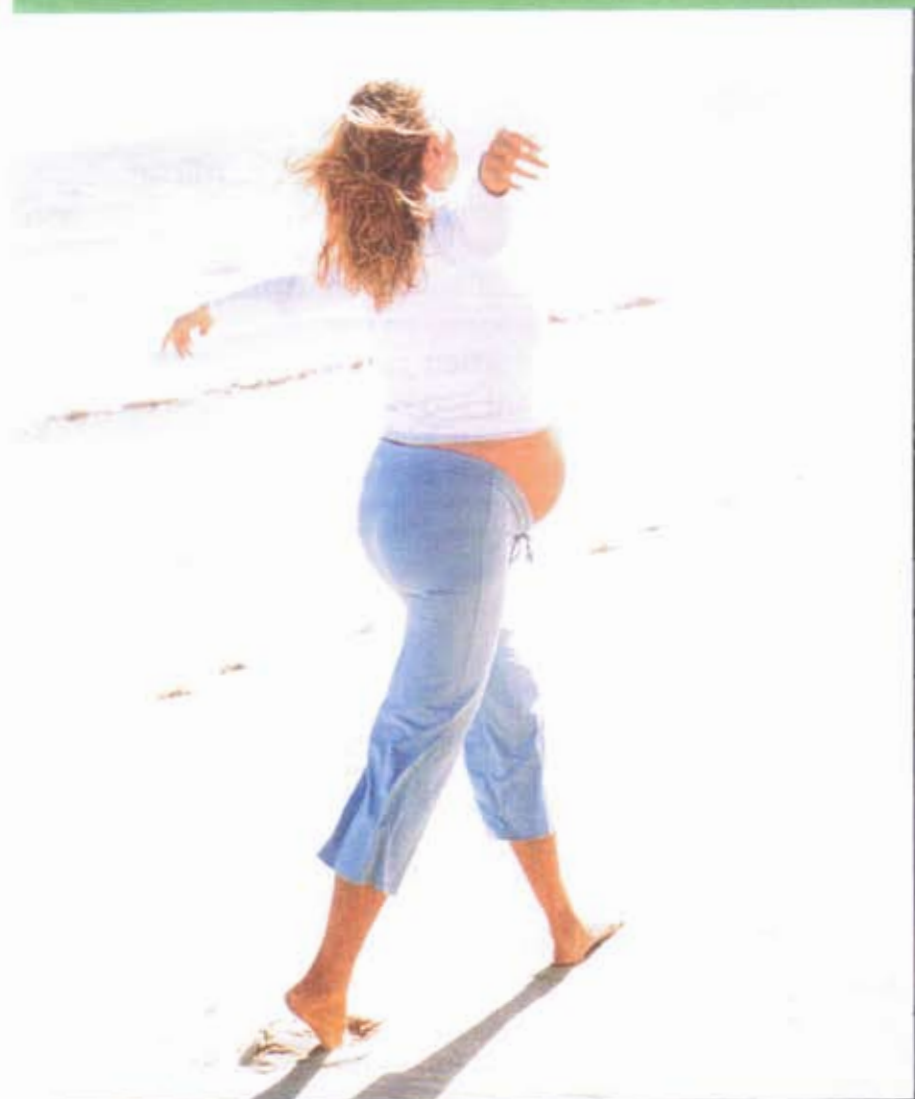
1

**Squat** Hold the back of a chair, feet hip-width apart. Bend your knees and lower to a quarter-squat **[A]**. Straighten to the starting position and repeat 10–15 times; do 2–3 sets. Widen legs and do 1 deeper squat; hold for 30 seconds **[B]**. After the final rep, drop onto knees to stand up.

2

**Bent-over upper-back press** Stand behind a chair and hold a 3- or 5-pound dumbbell in your right hand. Bend forward, resting your left forearm on the back of the chair **[A]**. Pull your right elbow up **[B]**. Pause, then slowly lower. Do 1 set of 8–12 reps, then switch arms.





## prepare

Working the muscles you'll be using during delivery is something Julie Tupler, a certified childbirth educator, highly recommends. Try the following:

**Kegels** > Kegels involve squeezing and relaxing the pelvic-floor muscles, which extend from your pubic bone to your tailbone and support your pelvic organs like a sling. Doing Kegels regularly can help you learn which muscles you'll need to relax during childbirth and also can help prevent incontinence. Tighten your pelvic-floor muscles, pulling upward and inward as if stopping your stream of urine; count to 3 and relax. Repeat for a count of 5, relax and repeat. Gradually work up to holding each Kegel for a count of 10, do 10–20 times, 5 times a day.

**Squats** > Do deep squats to stretch your lower back and strengthen and stretch your all-important pelvic-floor muscles. Tupler suggests that you also practice pushing with your abdominal muscles each time you have a bowel movement; simply bring your navel to your spine, hold it there and relax your pelvic-floor muscles.

minor modifications. Do them four to five times a week to keep your muscles strong and balanced.

3

**Chest press** Hold a 5-pound dumbbell in each hand; sit on the edge of a chair, place a pillow behind you and lean back. Extend your arms to midchest height **[A]**. Bend your elbows back until they are in line with your shoulders **[B]**. Do 10–12 reps, rest 60 seconds, then repeat.

4

**Belly breathing** Sit on the floor, legs crossed and back against a wall, placing both hands on your belly **[A]**. Inhale, expanding your belly into your hands, then exhale, pulling your navel in toward your spine **[B]**. Repeat 16–20 times, rest for 1 minute, then do another set of 16–20 reps.

[3A]

[3B]



[4A]

[4B]

