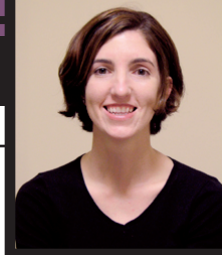


# Pilates and Pregnancy

By Pilates Director, Danielle Zack



Most women wonder if Pilates is recommended during a pregnancy, and fortunately the answer in most situations is yes! Pilates is a great way to tone abdominal and pelvic floor muscles, which can support an ever-changing pregnant body. Also, Pilates is very adaptable. Most Pilates exercises can be modified as your body and abilities change. The modifications keep the original goal of the exercise, while altering the form to work for your body. Exercise during pregnancy may support an easier labor, a speedy recovery postpartum, a quicker return to your pre-pregnancy weight, not to mention a comfortable pregnancy.

Sounds great, right? Well, there are a few basic guidelines to follow before you jump right in.

First, and most importantly, if you have never done Pilates before and just found out you are pregnant; this is not the time to start. Wait until the birth, and then find a qualified Pilates instructor to lead you through the exercises. Generally this will be about four to six weeks postpartum for a vaginal birth and six to eight weeks for a surgical birth.

Second, as with any exercise routine, check with your doctor. Inquire about your limitations during pregnancy, especially during unique circumstances.

Third, exercise moderately. Most experts recommend not letting your heart rate get above 140 beats per minute. If you do not own a heart rate monitor, use the "talk test". If you are too winded to talk in a normal fashion, it is time to slow down. Other signs that you need to take a break are dizziness, feeling faint, and nausea. Headache, shortness of breath, a racing heart, uterine contractions, and bleeding or leaking fluid are also signs to stop and see your physician.

Fourth, do not over stretch. Hormones, like relaxin, soften the ligaments in your body to allow your joints to spread for the birth of your baby. Consequently, women do experience more strains in their bodies during this time. You will want to be sure not to overstretch. Working in a smaller range of motion, avoiding bouncing exercises, and strengthening the muscles around your hips and spine will help you avoid the pain of strains.

Fifth, stay off your back. In the second trimester it is time to stop doing exercises while lying flat on your back. Your uterus has grown out of your pelvis and can press down on the major vein in your torso. This reduces the amount of oxygenated blood flow to your baby, and causes most women to be dizzy or light-headed.

All in all, pregnancy could be a very rewarding time to tune inward and connect with the principles of Pilates: centering, concentration, control, precision, breath and flow. Consistently working with these philosophies may enhance your workout experience and offer skills to bring to the birth and care of your baby.