

ESSENTIAL EXERCISES

Adapted from Essential Exercises for the Childbearing Year by Elizabeth Noble

Do your exercises in a quiet and relaxed state of mind. You're doing something special for you and your baby. Essential exercises work with those muscles which are directly affected by pregnancy, namely, the spine, abdomen, pelvic floor and your breath. Prenatal exercises not only improve muscle strength but also stretch tight muscles. It can prevent or alleviate many common discomforts of pregnancy such as backache, varicose veins, cramps, constipation, breathlessness, heartburn and postural discomfort. Prenatal exercise also has an indirect benefit that enhances the birth experience. Women who exercise regularly throughout pregnancy gain heightened body awareness, confidence in their physiological functions and knowledge of how these are affected by the changes brought on by pregnancy. Your breathing should be coordinated with the exercise movement. An easy guideline: "Exhale during exertion." This avoids the adverse cardiovascular effects of the Valsalva maneuver (effort against a closed glottis). Venous return is actually improved as positive pressure is maintained in the abdomen and negative pressure in the thorax.

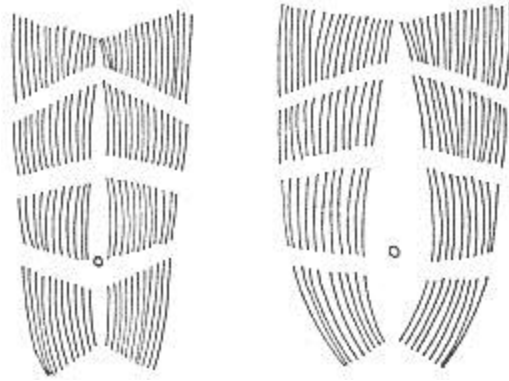
DIAPHRAGMIC BREATHING AND CONSCIOUS MUSCLE RELAXATION

Your diaphragm descends while inhaling and ascends while exhaling. Your abdomen should fill up first, then your lungs and reverse when exhaling. Focus on your breath and consciously "BREATH THROUGH" each muscle and body part, from head to toe. Let go of body tensions by exhaling the toxins and wastes out with your breath. Sooth and purify yourself by the air your inhale. This can be one of the most valuable tools use in labor. The more tense your body is, the more intense the contractions feel.



ABDOMINAL MUSCLES

Diastasis Recti: It is important to check for any separation of the recti abdominus muscles. You may notice bulging in the midline of the abdominal wall during exercises or as you go to sit up in bed. To check for diastasis recti, lie down with knees flexed. Raise your head (activates the recti muscle) and reach toward knees. Note any herniated area present. Have your midwife check for the severity of it and review the modified Curl-ups.



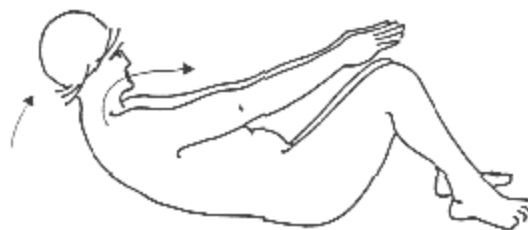
The recti muscles can separate as a zipper opens under stress.

Exercise your abdomen by taking a deep breath, then gradually contract the abdominal muscles while exhaling. Hold the contraction a second, then inhale. When fully exhaled and contracted, do a Kegal to appreciate the different muscles used in a Kegal. Remember to support your abdomen if the recti muscles are already separated.



CURL-UPS Regular and Modified:

The waist always stays on the floor. The trunk is never brought forward more than 45 degrees. In order to exercise all components of the abdominal musculature, curl-ups are done in both straight and diagonal directions. During diagonal curl-ups, each shoulder is turned toward the opposite knee.



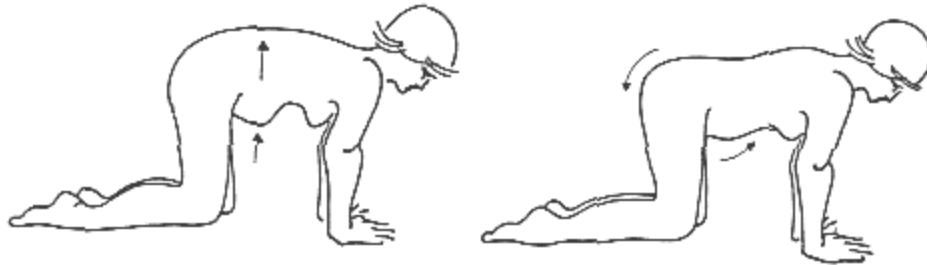
Regular



Modified

PELVIC ROCK

Your lower back and abdomen benefits from rocking your pelvis. It is very effective for relieving lower back aches and for balancing your ever-changing center of gravity. Take a deep breath, then gradually contract your abdominal muscles, and tuck under your buttocks and press up with lower back while slowly exhaling. When inhaling, relax your lower back to the neutral position only. **DO NOT HOLLOW YOUR BACK!** Variations: Rotate you pelvis in a circular motion as you arch your back. When sitting on a chair push your back into the back of the chair and tuck your buttocks forward.



KEGAL EXERCISES

Kegal exercises are important in reducing the chances of urinary stress incontinence, as they improve the support of the pelvic floor. They also increase the circulation to your perineum and pelvic floor, which allows for the perineum to have optimal stretch during delivery. Another benefit - they enhance your sexual experience. Take a deep breath and while exhaling, contract your pelvic floor muscles within and around your vagina. **THINK HIGH**, hold a second and release while inhaling. **ONLY DO KEGALS WHILE EXHALING.** Remember to keep your inner thighs relaxed and abdominal and buttock action separate. It's better to do 5 strong, high ones, than 25 loose ones. Try 100 a day. Combine with Pelvic Rocks and Abdominal Exercises. Beginning Kegals immediately postpartum will speed up the healing process.

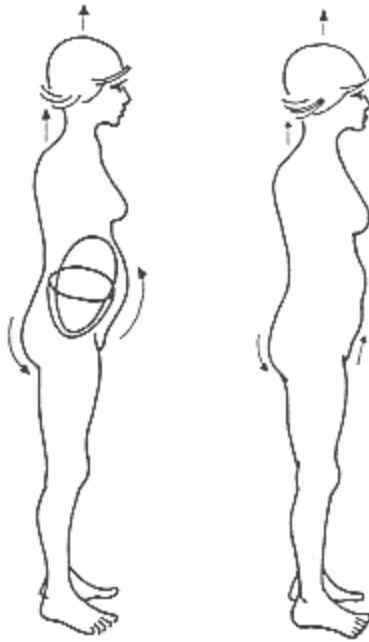
TAILOR POSITION

Sitting in a tailor's position will stretch your inner and outer thighs. Remember to keep your lower back straight and inner thighs relaxed. Replace all sitting with this position. Being able to fully spread and relax your legs will give you the largest diameter through which to push out your baby.

POSTURE

Good posture is maintained when the spine is straight, with adequate support from the abdominal muscles. The buttocks are tucked underneath, and your lower back is in the neutral position. **NEVER SLOUCH, STANDING OR SITTING!** Pelvic rocks will help to adjust your spine to

its changing center of gravity.



SQUATTING AND DIAPHRAGM STRETCH

Exhale while going down and inhale while standing up. Stretch your diaphragm to increase your breath capacity by extending arms over head and outwards again, while standing up from a squat. Support yourself if necessary. Replace all your bending with squatting.

ON GETTING UP

Always roll over when getting up and use your arms and legs.

*Some YMCA's have water exercises for pregnant women. The buoyancy makes exercising easier.

*Walking is the best general exercise!