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**Tips for an active pregnancy
and after your baby is born**

Credits

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This flyer can be used in connection with the exercise videos at www.gesundheitsfoerderung.ch/fruehe-foerderung. The following exercises are generally recommended during pregnancy and after the birth. As a precaution, however, you should consult with your gynaecologist or midwife. If you experience any pain or discomfort, stop training immediately and contact a medical professional if necessary. Health Promotion Switzerland does not accept any liability.

Keeping fit during pregnancy and the first year after the birth

In this brochure we show you ways in which you can stay fit during pregnancy and after your baby is born.

Make time for 20 to 30 minutes of activity every day. This activity should leave you a little breathless. Staying active helps you counter pain in your back and legs and deal with sleeping problems. You will make a faster recovery after the baby is born. Exercise also promotes the healthy growth of your child.

If you're already very active anyway, you can keep doing your usual activities as long as it still feels comfortable.

If you haven't been active up to now, we would like to motivate you now to start doing some exercises. It's good for you and for your baby.

Even maintaining an upright posture throughout the daily activities and consciously breathing into your abdomen several times a day will be good for you. Daily exercise in the fresh air makes you feel good.

Have fun trying out these exercises.

Remember...

... to drink 300 to 500 ml of water* or unsweetened tea during the exercises.



* Tap water in Switzerland tastes good and is perfectly hygienic.

Tip for partners

Make sure that mom is able to take shorter or longer breaks every week so that she has time to do her exercises and keep active. Use this time to connect to your baby.

Activities that leave you a little out of breath

Exercises during pregnancy 2½ hr per week of moderate intensity

Ideally spread over several days in the week, for example:



Cycling



Brisk walking



Dancing



Swimming or aqua aerobics

Additionally



Gentle strength training



Stretching



Pelvic floor exercises

Exercises after the birth



Daily walk



Supporting the tone of uterus



Pelvic floor exercises

Exercises for activating the pelvic floor



Daily walk



Gentle strength training



Stretching



Pelvic floor exercises

Exercises after the pelvic floor is activated 2½ hr per week of moderate intensity

Ideally spread over several days in the week, for example:



Cycling



Brisk walking



Dancing



Swimming or aqua aerobics

or

1¼ hr per week of high intensity

Ideally spread over several days in the week, for example:



Cross-country skiing



Brisk cycling



Step aerobics



Hiking

Recommended



Pelvic floor exercises

Additionally



Gentle strength training



Stretching

Getting to know your pelvic floor

The pelvic floor muscles play an important role during pregnancy and in the period before and after the birth. That's why we describe below a pelvic floor exercise that you can do at any time.

Sit on a hard chair with your back straight and your feet hip-width apart on the floor. You can place your hands on your belly. Close your eyes. Calmly breathe in and out. Now let the air enter your belly as you breathe in. As you breathe out, contract your anus and vagina and pull your pelvic floor in and up. Maintain this contraction while you slowly keep breathing out. As you breathe in, fully relax your pelvic floor again. We recommend repeating this exercise 10 times, if possible 2 or 3 times a day.



You can also imagine that your vagina is going up and down like a lift or that you are trying to keep a tampon inside your body. The pelvic floor muscles also contract when you try to stop passing wind.



Tips for taking care of the pelvic floor

- Keep your back straight when bending down or lifting.
- When you sneeze and cough: contract your pelvic floor before sneezing or coughing.
- When passing water or having a bowel movement try not to press down, but rather relax.
- Maintain an upright posture when pushing your stroller.



Click here to see the video
“Introducing the pelvic floor muscles”

Strengthening exercises during pregnancy

If you are not experiencing any problems during your pregnancy, there are no restrictions on the activities you can do. Physical activity does not have any negative effects on your baby. If you are not sure, ask your doctor or midwife.

Staying active while you are pregnant helps to counter pain in your back and legs, among other things. You will also sleep better and make a faster recovery after the baby is born. Exercise promotes the healthy growth of your child.

We don't recommend activities involving a high risk of falling, such as horse-riding or skiing. We discourage team sports where there is risk of colliding with others, and deep-sea diving. Hiking at altitudes up to about 2000 metres above sea level is fine.

If you enjoy music, play your favourite songs while you're exercising. Ideally, you should do the exercises 3 or 4 times a week.

If you feel unwell during an exercise or experience pain, stop the exercise and rest. Resume the exercise only when you feel completely well.

Warming up

Stand with your legs hip-width apart and imagine that a string is pulling the top of your head towards the ceiling. Walk on the spot until you have completed 100 steps (approx. 1 minute). Move your bent arms in time with your steps. Continue breathing calmly. Walk another 100 steps on the spot, lifting your knees as high as possible. End by shaking out your legs.



Strengthening your legs

Stand with your legs hip-width apart and your hands on your hips. Step forward with your right foot. Let your shoulders hang down and breathe in and out calmly. Bend your knees and stand up again. Remain with one foot forward. Repeat the knee exercises 10 times and then change sides.



Strengthening your back

Stand with your legs hip-width apart, toes and knees facing forward. Bend your knees slightly. Lean your upper body forward slightly. Be sure to keep your back straight (no hollow back) and your neck in a straight line with your spine. Fold your forearms in front of your chest. Throughout the exercise, focus your eyes on a spot on the floor approx. 2 metres in front of your feet. Raise your folded arms up to your ears while pulling your shoulders down. Lower your arms back in front of your chest. Continue breathing calmly. Repeat this exercise 10 times and then shake out your arms and legs.



Strengthening your pelvic floor

Go down on all fours. Keep your knees hip-width apart with the backs of the feet on the floor. Place your hands directly beneath your shoulders. Look at the floor. Now calmly breathe in and out, keeping your belly relaxed. Keep your back straight.

As you breathe out, contract your anus and vagina and pull your pelvic floor in and up. At the same time, pull your belly up towards your spine. You will notice a movement in your pelvis. As you breathe in, relax your belly, keeping your back straight. Repeat this exercise 10 times.



Moving your spine

Sit cross-legged on the floor or on a chair. Imagine a string pulling your head upwards. Keep your shoulders relaxed. Twist your upper body to the left. Look behind you over your left shoulder, placing your left hand behind your back. Place your right hand on your left knee and hold this position for a moment. Slowly twist back and continue turning to the right side. Do the same stretch on this side. Repeat the exercise 3 times on each side.



Click here to see the video
"Fitness during pregnancy"



Perception of your pelvic floor after the delivery

Congratulations on the birth of your child or children! You deserve some recovery time now. Enjoy a walk in the fresh air with your child or children every day.

You can start sensing your pelvic floor as early as the first day after the birth. The exercises can be done by all women, no matter how their child (or children) was (were) delivered. Do these exercises every day.

Feeling your pelvic floor muscles

Place your feet on the floor. Place your hands on your belly and close your eyes. Calmly breathe in and out. Now let the air enter your belly as you breathe in.

Keep breathing gently and, as you breathe out slowly, gently try to contract your anus and your vagina. As you breathe in, release your pelvic floor again. Continue this exercise for 10 breaths.

Take a short break, have something to drink and repeat this exercise for 10 breaths twice.



At the beginning you may not feel the muscles moving at all. Nevertheless, keep doing the exercises. As time passes, you will start to feel the muscles contracting.

Relaxing on your belly

Lie on your belly with a pillow under your belly. Breathe in deeply into your belly and out through your mouth for 10–15 minutes. Repeat this exercise 2 or 3 times a day.



It is best to wait until you have a good sensation of your pelvic floor muscles before proceeding to the pelvic floor strengthening exercises. Every woman reaches this point at a different time. If you're not sure, wait until you've had your check-up 6 weeks after giving birth.



Click here to see the video
“Perception of the pelvic floor after delivery”

Strengthening exercises after the delivery

After the perception-raising phase, it's time to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. As well as the pelvic floor, the abdominal and back muscles are important. Do the following exercises on as many days as possible.

If you experience pain or feel unwell, please talk to a healthcare professional.

Warming up

Dance to your favourite song to warm your body up.



Contracting your pelvic floor muscles

Go down on all fours. Breathe in and out gently. Round your back when you breathe out. Stretch your back when you breathe in. Let your head follow the movements of your back.

When you round your back, now also contract your anus and vagina. Try to draw your vagina towards your navel like a lift, breathing out at the same time.

When you stretch your back, breathe in and relax your pelvic floor. Be sure to keep your back straight and stretch your neck in a straight line with your spine.

Repeat this exercise 10 times. Take a short break. Shake out your shoulders and hips. Do this exercise 10 more times. Shake out your arms and wrists.



Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles

Lie on your left side. Support your head comfortably on your left arm. Pull your knees up to form a right angle and press your heels together. Lift your waist from the floor.

Now contract your anus and vagina and pull your pelvic floor in and up. As you breathe out, slowly raise your right knee towards the ceiling. Continue breathing calmly in this position, maintaining the contraction of your orifices and activation of the pelvic floor.

While breathing out for the second time, bring your right knee back down and relax when the knees are together. Repeat this exercise 10 times. Next, turn onto your right side and do the same exercise 10 times.



Click here to see the video
“Strengthening the pelvic floor muscles
after delivery”



Stretching your back

Turn round and go down on all fours. Sit back on your feet and lower your head between your outstretched arms. This will stretch your back.



Getting physically active

After you have activated the pelvic floor muscles after the birth, and if you feel well, you can gradually resume gentle exercise. It is good for your health to extend your training stepwise. 2½ hours of moderate activity per week is the goal. Continue doing the pelvic floor exercises in parallel. Be careful when doing exercises for the abdominal muscles. Avoid any pressure on the pelvic floor or in the belly.

Since the recovery process is different in every woman, it's not possible to say how long this recovery process will take in general.

The course of weight loss after the birth also differs for every woman. Sufficient exercise and a balanced diet help with the weight loss. It is good for your own well-being and health to achieve a normal weight within a year of the birth.

Ideally, you should do the following exercises 3 or 4 times a week.

Go for a walk

Walk at a moderate pace with your child or children in the stroller for about 10 minutes. This activity should leave you a little breathless. Find a suitable place where you can do your exercises.



Knee bending with stroller

Stand behind the stroller with your legs hip-width apart. Hold the handle. Keep your back straight during the exercise. Breathe in while bending your knees. Push the stroller away from you slightly while doing this. Breathe out while contracting your orifices and stand up. Pull the stroller back towards you while doing this. Repeat this exercise 10 times.



Strengthening your back

Put the brakes on the stroller. Take one step back from the stroller. Stand with your legs hip-width apart. Bend your knees, push your buttocks backwards and stretch your arms upwards, keeping them close to your ears. Keep your back straight (no hollow back) with your neck in a straight line with your spine and continue breathing calmly. Your hands should hover above the handle of the stroller. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Then slightly raise your right and left arms alternately. Your upper body remains straight while you continue breathing in a relaxed manner. Repeat with each arm 10 times.



Click here to see the video
"Getting physically active after delivery"

Strengthening the muscles in your back and legs

Stand behind the stroller with your legs hip-width apart and your back straight. Lean your upper body forward slightly. Your neck remains in a straight line with your spine. Rest both hands lightly on the stroller for support. Breathe in and push your bent left leg backwards. As you breathe out, lower the leg again. Repeat this exercise slowly 10 times. Take a short break without putting your leg back on the floor and repeat the exercise another 10 times.

Then repeat the exercise with the right leg. Shake out your arms and legs.



Continue walking

Next, walk briskly for a further 10 minutes.

This activity should leave you a little breathless.



Further information for parents

- Information for pregnant women and parents with small children
www.gesundheitsfoerderung.ch/fruehe-foerderung
- Physical activity tips to do with your child (babies and small children up to 6 years)
www.gesundheitsfoerderung.ch/paprica-bewegungstipps
- Health-enhancing physical activity in adults
www.hepa.ch > Bewegungsempfehlungen > Dokumente in Englisch
- Brochure without words (Healthy lifestyle, Germany)
<https://www.gesund-ins-leben.de/inhalt/heft-ohne-worte-fuer-schwangere-31105.html>
- Nutrition for babies and small children
<https://kinderandentisch.ch>

Organisations that offer courses or individual advice for pregnant women and parents with children

- www.physioswiss.ch
- www.pelvisuisse.ch
- www.buggyfit.ch
- www.bgb-schweiz.ch
- www.beckenboden.ch

App with exercises for strengthening the pelvic floor muscles after the birth

INSELhealth – mama care (German and English)



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