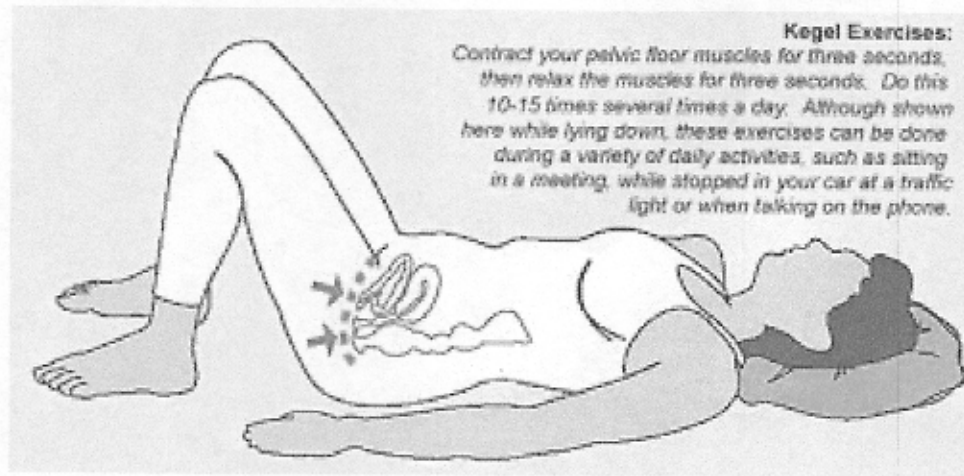


EXERCISES



Kegel / Pelvic Floor Exercises

Kegel Exercises are so extremely important! Kegel exercises help strengthen your pelvic floor, the muscles that support the bladder, uterus, and bowels. By strengthening these muscles during your pregnancy, you can develop the ability to relax and control the muscles in preparation for labor and birth.

Pelvic Floor exercises are also highly recommended during the postpartum period to promote the healing of perineal tissues, increase the strength of the pelvic floor muscles and help these muscles return to a healthy state. Another great benefit is increased urinary control. So if you sneeze, laugh, or cough and a little pee squirts out uncontrollably, you've got a weak pelvic floor and you'll want to start working on that daily.

HOW TO: To do Kegels, imagine you are trying to stop the flow of urine, clenching in and up your pelvic floor muscles. When you do this, you are practicing Kegel / Pelvic Floor exercises. Each time you contract the muscles of the pelvic floor, hold for a count of three and then relax. While doing Kegels, try not to move your leg, buttock, or abdominal muscles. In fact, no one should be able to tell that you are doing Kegel exercises. The beauty is, you can do them anywhere! You also want to ensure your bladder is empty before practicing the exercises. Working out with a full or partially full bladder can result in a bladder or urinary tract infection, which can be hard to get rid of while pregnant. I recommend doing a minimum of five sets of 30 Kegel exercises a day. More is better if you can get them in.

Tailor Exercises: Tailor exercises strengthen the pelvic, hip, and thigh muscles. This can help relieve low back pain in the third trimester and give you strength during labor.



Tailor Sit: This practice helps to eliminate unnecessary pressure in the pelvic area which improves circulation to the legs. It uses your sit bones (your pelvis) to support your weight, preventing unnecessary discomfort of using your pelvic floor muscles to support your weight while you sit through the day. Sitting in Tailor Sit also allows you to lean forward, taking the weight of the uterus off your back. Tailor sitting also stretches the inside of your legs to help prepare you for second stage labor.

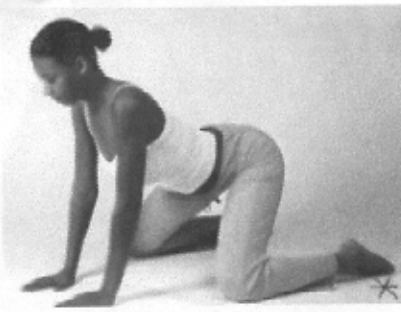
HOW TO: Sit on the floor with your knees bent and feet flat together (alternate option: ankles crossed). Lean slightly forward, and keep your back straight but relaxed. Use this position whenever possible throughout the day.



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Tailor Press: This exercise stretches your hip and thigh muscles while strengthening your arm and leg muscles.

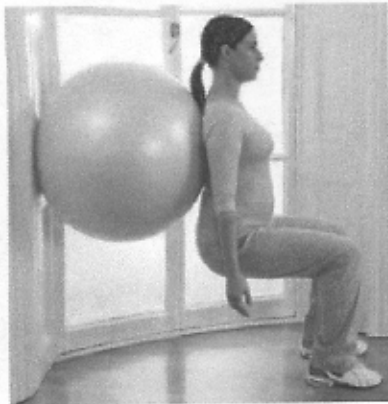
HOW TO: Sit on the floor with your knees bent and the soles of your feet flat together. Grasp your ankles and pull your feet gently toward your body. Cup your hands under your knees. Inhale. While pressing your knees down against your hands, press your hands up against your knees (counter-pressure). Hold for a count of five. Repeat. You can perform on yourself, or have your partner help you.



Pelvic Tilt

This position helps relieve back pain, a common problem during pregnancy.

HOW TO: Get on your hands and knees, arms shoulder-width apart and knees hip-width apart, keeping your arms straight, but not locking the elbows. Tuck your buttocks under and round your back as you breathe in. Relax your back into a neutral position as you breathe out. Repeat at your own pace.



Squatting

Squats are so simple to perform and can be one of the most powerful exercises to prepare your body for birth. I recommend any pregnant woman squat every day to relax and open the pelvis. This will provide easy relief as your belly grows. But more importantly, over time the squats will strengthen the upper legs which are crucial for use during labor. As you start to feel heavier in pregnancy, use props such as an exercise ball between you and the wall for stability.

HOW TO: Stand with your feet slightly wider than hip-width apart, toes pointed outward. Contract your abdominal muscles, lift your chest, and relax your shoulders. Lower your tailbone toward the floor as though you were going to sit down on a chair. Find your balance — most of your weight should be toward your heels. Take a deep breath and, exhaling, push into your legs to rise to a standing position. Focus on relaxing and letting your breath drop deeply into your belly.



Prenatal Yoga & Stretching

You want to look for a yoga studio that specifically offers a prenatal/postnatal class. This ensures the instructors are educated on various poses you can do safely as you progress in your pregnancy and your tummy grows. I also recommend emailing or calling the yoga studio before attending. This is great, because you can get to know the instructor, feel the energy of the class, and meet some of the other great moms-to-be in the area.

OR...utilize well-rated prenatal yoga DVDs, such as *Healthy Mom, Happy Baby* and *Prenatal Kundalini Yoga*. Both DVDs are around \$20 each, well worth it as you can use it thru your entire pregnancy. I love them both for different reasons. *Healthy Mom, Happy Baby* is more focused on the poses, helping you get them right, and giving tips on how to do them correctly as your belly grows. *Prenatal Kundalini Yoga* is more focused on the meditation process thru the poses.

If yoga just doesn't sound like you, then I really urge you to do at least some simple stretching a few times a week. Yoga and stretching will enhance your flexibility, prevent your muscles from tightening, and make you feel looser and more relaxed. All of this is in preparation for the birth. Be sure to breathe deeply and regularly as you stretch. As you progress in your pregnancy, your ligaments will become looser and more relaxed naturally. Stretching will help to take the tension off, release the stress of weight-bearing ligaments, and prepare the body (especially your pelvic area) for the birth.

Shoulder Circles: While seated or standing, rotate your shoulders backwards and down in the largest circle you can make. This opens the chest, counteracting the rounded shoulders so many pregnant women get.

Chest Stretch: Standing in a doorway, place both hands at shoulder height on either side of the doorway, elbows bent. Step your right foot forward until you feel a slight stretch in the chest muscles (being careful not to stretch too much). Hold for 30 seconds. Switch feet, stepping your left foot forward. Hold for 30 seconds.

Roll-down: Stand with your back against a wall, your feet about shoulder-width apart a comfortable distance from the wall, knees slightly bent. Inhale. Then, as you exhale, draw in your abdominal muscles, moving your chin toward your chest as you roll your torso down one vertebra at a time. "Roll" as far down as you're comfortable going. Keep your weight centered between your feet. Inhale at the bottom of the roll-down, and as you exhale, roll back up, trying to "print" each vertebra on the wall. As you return to an upright position, make sure your head is the last part of your body to uncurl. Repeat.