

Exercise When Trying to Conceive: How to Increase Chances of Getting Pregnant

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As a personal trainer and mother of two, I definitely understand the importance of exercise for maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle. That said, monster workouts that are worn like a badge of honor can also dramatically reduce your chances of getting pregnant. The same goes if you are not exercising at all. In this article, we'll explore the pros and cons of exercise when trying to conceive.

We'll discuss pregnancy including how exercise affects your fertility including:

- How exercise can help your fertility
- Types of workouts that can harm fertility
- Exercises to increase fertility

How Exercise Can Help Your Fertility

Exercise has so many benefits and I think many of us would lose our sanity without it. Here is a list of some of the many benefits of exercise on women's fertility:

1. Exercise makes all the systems function better

Physical activity can improve heart health, key hormonal function and oxygen and blood flow to reproductive organs. A study in Naples Italy found that exercise improved cardiovascular risk factors, hormonal profile and reproductive function as well as menstrual cycles and ovulation.[1]

2. Exercise increases oxygen in the body

Oxygen acts as an anti-inflammatory within the tissues of the body and increased oxygen brings more energy, vitality and health.[2] The simple act of deep breathing can bring in more oxygen as can breathing deeply due to exercise. Increased oxygen brings in nutrients to the body and assists in taking out toxins, reducing the opportunity for disease.

3. Improves your mood

If you are already an avid exerciser, you are well aware of the endorphins produced by exercise. It can often turn your day around when exercise produces positive feelings. Exercise can make changes in the brain that regulate stress and anxiety, often reducing these symptoms. The length of time and intensity of the exercise does not directly correlate to the happiness factor. Several studies have shown that any kind of exercise for any amount of time can often make you feel better.[3] As Valerie Waters tells her celebrity

clients “You are only one workout away from a good mood!”

4. Helps with weight loss

It is common knowledge that exercise will help with weight loss. What many people don't take into consideration is that what you eat is the primary source of weight loss. If we made an equation of food and exercise, then food would be 80% of the weight loss and exercise about 20%.[4] Being at a healthy weight will improve your fertility but you can't out-train a bad diet and the body is resistant to releasing weight when sleep-deprived, so make good nutrition and sleep a priority over exercise.

5. Gives you energy

Exercise can actually reduce feelings of fatigue and increase energy levels. This has been proven true even in people with persistent fatigue and those suffering from serious illness. Moderate exercise can repair tissue damage and protect cells by increasing the body's production of natural antioxidants.[5]

6. Improves sleep

In the peak health triad components of sleep, water, and nutrition, sleep ranks number one. Sleep is an essential component for recovery and optimal body function. Many of today's diseases and medical issues can be vastly improved by quality sleep. Moderate activity for 30 minutes for five days per week can provide up to a 65% improvement in sleep.[6]

7. Decreases stress

Researchers have found that women with high-stress levels are less likely to conceive.[7] When exercising with fertility in mind it would be best to choose an exercise that is not competitive and has a calming effect on the body such as yoga or a walk rather than an adrenaline fix such as CrossFit or kickboxing.

8. Better sex!

And let's not overlook the obvious, if you look good and feel good you are going to have sex more often, which improves your chances of conception. Exercise is also a great way to spend time with your partner on a long walk or a relaxing kayak down the river.

Exercise & Male Fertility: Exercise Improves Sperm in Men

Regular exercise can lead to better sperm production. Men who exercise consistently have better semen quality and improved hormone levels than men who do not exercise.[8]

In studies, men that exercise have higher sexual function scores than those that are sedentary. In a study of sedentary men that were assigned thirty minutes of moderate exercise three days a week, their semen volume improved by more than eight percent.

Their sperm motility increased by 12%, the morphology improved 17% percent and they had well over 20 percent more sperm cells on average compared to the control group, which did not exercise at all. Something as simple as a short walk has been proven to reduce erectile dysfunction and improve sperm quality.[9] Exercise can help improve male fertility.

BMI & Fertility: Your Body Fat Levels Impact Fertility

Being underweight or overweight can impact fertility in both men and women. Ovulation can be impaired if body fat is less than 12% or more than 30-35%. Many doctors use a gauge of a body mass index (BMI) to measure body fat. Please keep in mind that this is a general baseline and it can be skewed by muscle mass or bone structure. You can find your BMI by using a [BMI Calculator](#) and help find a healthy weight to get pregnant.

BMI for Men & Women

- Starvation: less than 14.9%
- Underweight: 15 to 18.5%
- Normal: 18.5-24.9%
- Overweight: 25 – 29.9%
- Obesity: 30% or greater
- Increased risk of infertility: under 18.5% or over 30%

Ideal BMI for conception: 19-25%

In obese infertile women weight loss has resulted in a 35% increase in achieving pregnancy and reduced miscarriage rate by 57%. There are fewer risks during pregnancy with a healthy weight as well as lower costs for fertility treatment.[13] The ideal healthy weight to get pregnant is around 19-25%.

Is Exercise Good or Bad for Fertility?

To enhance fertility, any kind of extreme - not exercising enough or exercising too much, can make conception more challenging. This is true for both men and women. There is a sweet spot of enough exercise for good health but not too much that puts the body into fight or flight mode and then not receptive for conception. The thing to keep in mind is when you are seeking a pregnancy is that moderation is key.

Excessive Exercise & Fertility: How Exercise Can Hurt Your Fertility

If you exercise intensely for more than 60 minutes per day you are most likely decreasing your body's optimal fertility. Women who exercise to exhaustion are associated with 2.3 times the odds of fertility problems versus women exercising at a low intensity.[14]

Excessive exercising can cause the body to break down the proteins in the muscles, producing ammonia which is a pregnancy inhibiting chemical.[15] Intense exercise lowers progesterone and throws off hormone levels. Also, by decreasing the intensity of daily workouts and limiting the endorphin rushes

miscarriage risk can be reduced.[16]

High impact, vigorous or intense exercise can cause complications when having fertility treatments and caution must be used as some fertility drugs can enlarge the ovaries and put them at risk to twist.[17]

Exercise When Trying To Conceive: What To Avoid

- Cycling
- Bikram (Hot) Yoga
- Running – long distance or at high intensity
- Crossfit or High-Intensity Weight Training
- Endurance Sports

By not exercising to excess the body will be able to conserve and have a better opportunity to use its resources for reproductive endeavors.

Exercises That Decrease Fertility in Men

Bicycling - Physical activity, specifically weightlifting and outdoor activities have been proven to improve semen quality. The exception to this guideline is bicycling, which has been proven to reduce sperm concentrations by 34% and that is with bicycling less than 1.5 hours per week. Bicycling has also been proven to lead to erectile dysfunction. Riding a bike does not benefit sperm and should be left out of the exercise regime while trying to conceive. [10]

Heat is one of the top causes of reduced fertility in men and it can take up to three months for a sperm count to recover after exposure to high heat. Sperm requires a temperature of 95 degrees rather than the internal body temperature of 98.6 degrees. When the testicles are exposed to prolonged heat the sperm can die, be abnormally shaped or the body may produce less sperm. [18]

Exercises and Things to Avoid for Both Men and Women

- Tight Fitting Clothing
- Bicycling and cycle-related sports
- Hot Yoga
- Saunas
- Hot tubs
- Heated Car Seats
- Cell phones and electronics in pockets or in the "on" mode on the body

In both men and women extremes of exercise, either too much or too little have negative repercussions in the body. There must be balance in the approach to exercise so that the body can function optimally.

Be aware of electronic devices while exercising

The EMFs emitted by phones and other electronic players have a negative impact on fertility. We can

also lose ourselves in the music and not pay attention to the exertion rate when we are plugged in. In order to stay at that moderate pace, leave the music at home for now and get outside and enjoy your run in nature.

Exercises That Will Increase Fertility

Less is more

The key when choosing exercise while wanting to improve fertility is moderation. Intensity should be at or below a medium level and keeping endurance time from 30 minutes to an hour. Doctors recommend 30 minutes per day for general conditioning. [19]

Ideal Exercise Activities to Increase Fertility:

- Walking
- Nia
- Tai Chi
- Zumba
- Chi Gong
- Belly Dance
- Yoga
- Strength Training
- Dancing
- Water Aerobics
- Swimming
- Elliptical Machine
- Pilates
- Rowing
- Light jogging
- Stand up Paddleboard
- Cross-country Skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Kayaking
- Sex!

Fertility Specific Exercises

Another way to think of exercise is what kind of exercise activities would you engage in if you were pregnant? It would be ideal to choose activities you can continue on a consistent basis well into pregnancy.

For Women

- Pelvic Floor Exercises - [Kegel exercises](#) are great for strengthening the pelvic floor muscles which will aid in childbirth.

- YOGA - specifically [restorative yoga poses](#), are great for reducing stress while at the same time increasing sex drive.

For Men

- **LIFTING WEIGHTS** - Exercise, specifically weight training, has been linked to increased testosterone production which can also help fertility. [11] In men, studies have found that the larger the waist circumference the lower the sperm count so being at an ideal BMI can increase fertility.[12]

Timing Exercise to Your Menstrual Cycle

- **Follicular Phase (Day 1 of menses – to ovulation)** - This is a time you can do more volume (a longer run for example), focus on progress (heavier weights, a more challenging yoga pose), a higher level of endurance and more strength. [20] Your metabolic rate decreases during menstruation and hits its lowest point one week before ovulation. Insulin sensitivity is higher during this phase, so you may want to keep carbohydrates on the lighter side.
- **Ovulation (Day 14)** - Your body is at its strongest during this point of the cycle, but you can also be at a higher risk for injury due to the dramatic increase in estrogen during this phase. Pay attention to how your body and joints feel as you exercise and adjust accordingly.
- **Luteal Phase (Day 15 – to Day 28)** - Metabolic rate starts to increase and insulin sensitivity is starting to decline during this time. Lower intensity cardio with moderate intensity strength work would be a better choice. Yoga may be the best exercise during PMS. You may fatigue a bit more during these two weeks. Consider foods rich in the amino acid tryptophan such as turkey or pumpkin seeds.

Deep Breathing

The sympathetic nervous system is in charge of the fight or flight response which when left in the “on” position can drain the adrenals, increase stress and negatively impact fertility.

The parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) helps us to rest and restore our bodies and can have a positive impact on fertility. The only way we know how to engage the PNS is through the breath.[21]

In order to exercise the PNS, the best practice is to take a series of long slow deep breaths using the diaphragm and this sends the message to the body that you are safe and can relax. This helps stop the drain on the adrenals, reduces stress and lowers blood pressure and can bring in feelings of happiness.

Meditation & Fertility

Meditation is another way to engage the PNS. Keep in mind that stress along with making you feel worse can impact the body in numerous ways: it lowers the bodies resistance to disease, make us feel bad and can bring on depression, anger or other undesirable emotions, slows the body’s ability to burn fat, can incite negative treatment of those around you, cause inflammation, fatigue and numerous other negative impacts to the body. The more often we stop and breathe deeply our body and mind benefits.

Conclusion

Regular exercise will improve your fertility and give you shorter and easier labor. Get outside, breathe deeply and exercise every day!