

## Pregnancy and sport

Pregnancy is a natural condition, not an illness. Unless you have complications, it should be possible to enjoy your sport at some level throughout most of your pregnancy.

### Factors to consider

Before you decide whether to continue playing your chosen sport throughout pregnancy, consider the following factors:

- Your health and the risk status of your pregnancy
- Your stage of pregnancy
- The type of sport you play
- The degree of exertion required during play
- The risk of overheating during play
- The risk of injury during play.

You should discuss these issues with your doctor before you decide.

### Your health and the risk status of your pregnancy

In some cases your doctor may advise you to avoid playing sports if you have a pregnancy-related medical condition like pre-eclampsia, or if you are carrying a high-risk pregnancy such as multiple fetuses. You may be asked to try low-impact exercises, such as walking or swimming, as alternatives.

### Stage of pregnancy

Generally, the baby is cushioned in the amniotic sac. However, a hard blow to your belly could damage the placenta and affect the baby's blood and oxygen supply.

During the first trimester, the baby is small enough to be protected by your pelvic bones. As your pregnancy progresses, the growing baby is no longer shielded by your pelvis, which puts it at direct risk if you fall or heavily contact another player.

### Changes during pregnancy

There are many changes during pregnancy that may affect your sporting performance:

- **Increase in body weight** – as your body shape changes, the centre of gravity moves forward increasing the curvature of your spine. This makes rapid changes in direction difficult. The increase in body size can also make some activities uncomfortable (for example jogging), particularly in the last trimester.
- **Loosening of all ligaments** – during pregnancy your joints will gradually loosen up ready for the birth. This creates an increased risk of injury. Take care with contact sports and any sport that involves jumping and frequent changes of direction.
- **Increase in resting heart rate** – pregnancy increases your resting heart rate, so pre-pregnancy heart rate targets are not reliable. If you are a healthy pregnant sportsperson, you can monitor the intensity of exercise by your exertion symptoms. You should stop when you are tired; don't exercise until you're exhausted.

- **Decrease in blood pressure** – as the placenta grows, you develop more blood vessels. This causes your blood pressure to drop. From about the fourth month, try to avoid rapid changes of position. This includes changing from lying to standing and vice versa. This will help to avoid dizzy spells. Never stop suddenly, because it takes your heart longer to adjust and a sudden stop in movement may make you feel dizzy or faint. After the fourth month, avoid any leg exercises while lying on your back, because the weight of the fetus can reduce the return of blood to your heart.

## Type of sport

Whether or not it is safe for you to participate in sport during your pregnancy depends a lot on the type of sport you play. General recommendations include:

- **Non-contact sport** – this is any sport that doesn't involve the possibility of contact with another player, such as swimming, walking and jogging. In most cases, it is safe for pregnant women to play non-contact sports during the entire pregnancy, as long as they consult closely with their doctor and don't over-exert themselves.
- **Minimal contact sports** – this is sport that involves minimal contact, such as racquet sports and netball. These sports are considered safe during the first trimester (first three months) with the possibility of continuing into the second trimester depending on the circumstances (ie the level of competition, fitness of the mother and state of the pregnancy). Consult closely with your doctor if you wish to continue playing into your second trimester.
- **Contact and collision sports** – contact and collision sports, such as soccer and basketball, are considered safe only in the first trimester.
- **Lifting and straining** – exercises that involve straining, such as lifting heavy weights, are also potentially dangerous (particularly in the later stages of pregnancy) and are not recommended.

## Sports to avoid altogether

Some sports or activities should be avoided during pregnancy. They include:

- Scuba diving
- Parachuting
- Water skiing
- Martial arts
- Gymnastics
- Trampolining.

## The risk of overheating during play

It is important to avoid getting overheated during pregnancy. Avoid exercising in hot or humid weather and in areas with poor ventilation. General suggestions include:

- Don't play sports on hot or humid days.
- Avoid playing sports when you are ill or have a fever.
- Make sure you drink plenty of water before, during and after sport.
- Wear lightweight clothing.
- Interchange with other players as often as possible so you get plenty of rest breaks.

## The risk of injury during play

When you are pregnant, the changes going on in your body can make you more likely to injure yourself. For example:

- Hormones such as relaxin soften ligaments, which increases your risk of joint injuries.
- The extra weight places additional strain on joints and muscles.
- Your growing belly affects your balance by pushing your centre of gravity forward.

## Pregnant women, sport and legal issues

According to anti-discrimination laws, it is illegal to discriminate against a woman who plays sport on the grounds of pregnancy or potential pregnancy. For example, a female athlete could have grounds to sue if she wasn't selected for the team because of her pregnancy.

For further information on these complex legal issues, consult with your lawyer, the Australian Sports Commission or Sports Medicine Australia.

## See your doctor immediately

If you experience any of the following symptoms during or after exercise, you should stop and contact your doctor immediately:

- High heart rate
- Dizziness or faintness
- Headache
- Contractions
- Bleeding or amniotic fluid leakage
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Back or pelvic pain
- Decreased fetal movements
- Severe and rapid swelling of your face, hands or ankles.

Any illness or pregnancy complication should be fully assessed and discussed before you start or continue an exercise program.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your sporting association
- Your lawyer
- Women and Sport Unit, Australian Sports Commission Tel. (02) 6214 1809
- Sports Medicine Australia Tel. (02) 6241 9344

## Things to remember

- Pregnancy is a natural condition rather than an illness. Unless you have complications, it should be possible to enjoy your sport at some level throughout most of your pregnancy.
- It is important to discuss the issues with your doctor and sporting organisation before you make a decision.
- If you have a medical condition such as pre-eclampsia, or if you are carrying a high-risk pregnancy such as multiple fetuses, your doctor may advise you to avoid playing sports altogether.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Smartplay

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**Copyright** © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.