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# Exercises to Strengthen Muscles during Pregnancy

Talk to your healthcare provider or physical therapist about which exercises will best help you and how to do them correctly and safely.

Each of the following exercises is designed to develop the muscles around your trunk and pelvis, as well as the muscles of your arms and legs. Exercise helps strengthen the muscles needed for labor and delivery. It also helps reduce backaches, swelling, and constipation. Strengthening your arm muscles will help you lift and hold your baby. These exercises may be done throughout your pregnancy, but they should be avoided if you begin to have any pain. Talk to your healthcare provider about which exercises will best help you and how to do them correctly and safely. Report any unusual or unexpected symptoms to your healthcare provider.

- **Quadruped arm and leg raise:** Get down on your hands and knees. Pull in your belly button and tighten your abdominal muscles to stiffen your spine. While keeping your abdominals tight, raise one arm and the opposite leg away from you. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Lower your arm and leg slowly and change sides. Do this 10 times on each side.
- **Modified push-up:** Get onto your hands and knees, with your hands directly below your shoulders. Slowly bend your arms and lower yourself toward the floor, being careful to keep your spine straight. When you can do 2 sets of 15 easily, do this with your feet off the floor. Gradually progress to doing regular push-ups with your legs out straight.
- **Lunge:** Stand and take a large step forward with your right leg. Dip your left knee down toward the floor and bend your right leg. Return to the starting position. Repeat the exercise stepping forward with the left leg and dipping your right leg down toward the floor. Do 2 sets of 8 to 12 on each side. When this gets easy, you can do this exercise with small weights in your hands.
- **Wall squat:** Stand with your back, shoulders, and head against a wall and look straight ahead. Keep your shoulders relaxed and your feet about 3 feet (90 centimeters) away from the wall and a shoulder's width apart. Keeping your head against the wall, slide down the wall. Lower your buttocks toward the floor until your thighs are almost parallel to the floor. Hold this position for 10 seconds. Make sure to tighten your thigh muscles as you slowly slide back up to the starting position. Do 2 sets of 8 to 12. You can increase the amount of time you are in the lower position to help strengthen your quadriceps muscles.
- **Heel raise:** Stand behind a chair or counter with both feet flat on the floor. Using the chair or counter as a support, rise up onto your toes and hold for 5 seconds. Then slowly lower yourself down without holding onto the support. (It's OK to keep holding onto the support if you need to.) When this exercise becomes less painful, try doing this exercise while you are standing on the injured leg only. Repeat 15 times. Do 2 sets of 15. Rest 30 seconds between sets.
- **Rowing exercise:** Wrap a piece of elastic tubing around an immovable object. Sit in a chair, bend your arms 90 degrees, and hold one end of the tubing in each hand. Keep your forearms vertical and your elbows at shoulder level and bent 90 degrees. Pull backward on the band and squeeze your shoulder blades together. You can also do this exercise standing. Do 2 sets of 15.
- **Thoracic extension:** Sit in a chair and clasp both arms behind your head. If you are unable to reach behind your head, hold your arms across your chest instead. Gently arch backward and look up toward the ceiling. Repeat 10 times. Do this several times each day.
- **Arm slide on wall:** Sit or stand with your back against a wall and your elbows and wrists against the

wall. Slowly slide your arms upward as high as you can while keeping your elbows and wrists against the wall. Do 2 sets of 10.

- **Shoulder abduction:** Stand with your arms at your sides. Rest your palms against your sides. Hold a 2 to 4-pound (1 to 2 kilogram) weight in each hand. Keeping your arms straight, lift your arms out to the side and toward the ceiling. Hold this position for 5 seconds and then slowly bring your arms down. Do 2 sets of 8 to 12.
- **Biceps curl:** Stand and hold a 5- to 8-pound (2 to 4 kilogram) weight in your hand. If you do not have a weight, use a soup can or hammer. Bend your elbow and bring your hand (palm up) toward your shoulder. Hold 5 seconds. Slowly straighten your arm and return to your starting position. Repeat on the other side. Do 2 sets of 8 to 12.

In addition to these exercises, aerobic exercise at a moderate to vigorous intensity is recommended. Try to get 30 minutes of aerobic exercise each day, 5 to 7 days a week. Stationary bicycling, fast walking, and using an elliptical trainer are all examples of aerobic exercise.

Another important exercise after pregnancy is the Kegel exercise. It strengthens your pelvic muscles. You can do Kegels anywhere—while you sit at a desk, wait for a bus, wash dishes, drive a car, wait in line, or watch TV. No one will know you are doing them. Here's how you do them:

- You can feel the muscles that need to be exercised by squeezing the muscles in your genital area. You might find that it helps to pretend you are contracting the pelvic muscles to stop a flow of urine or stop from passing gas.
- Squeeze these muscles and hold for 3 to 10 seconds. Do this 10 to 20 times. Let the muscles relax completely between contractions. Do these sets of contractions 3 to 4 times a day.

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This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

[References](#)

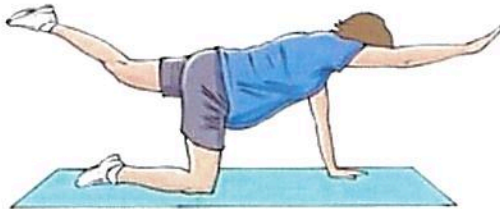
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Modified push-up



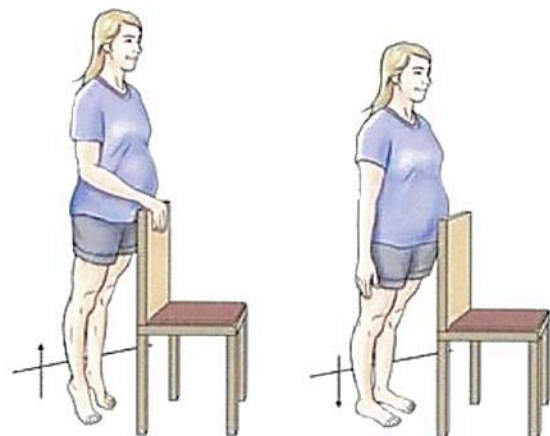
Quadruped arm/leg raise



Lunge

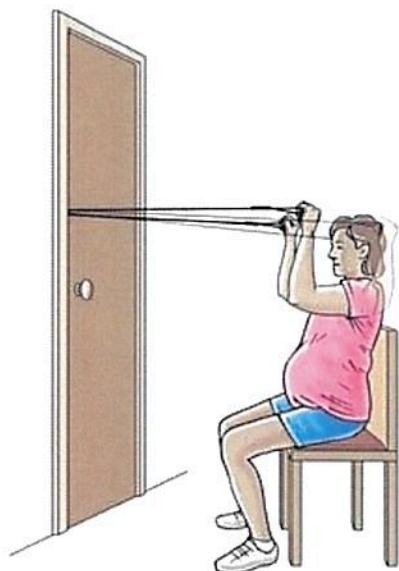


Wall squat



Heel raise

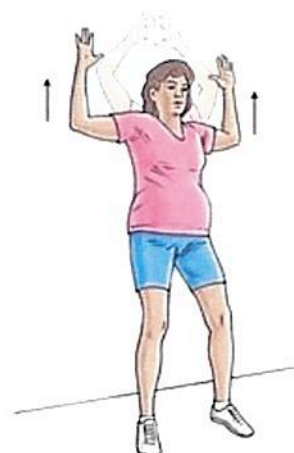
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Rowing exercise



Thoracic extension



Arm slide on wall



Shoulder abduction



Biceps curl