



Exercises for relaxation

There are many stretching exercises you can use during pregnancy for relaxation. Try these exercises to help alleviate some discomforts of pregnancy and decrease anxiety and stress.

■ Tailor sitting

Sit on the floor with the soles of your feet together (if your feet open, keep the outer edges touching). Your knees should be bent and out to the sides with your feet at a comfortable distance from your body.



You can place a blanket or towel under your buttocks to elevate them slightly or place pillows under your knees to support them if this increases comfort. Do not bounce your knees or push down on your knees.

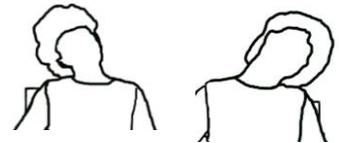
Benefits: Position provides mild stretching of the inner thighs, relaxes the pelvic floor, and relaxes the lower back. This “open” position provides a sense of how the body can open during birth.



While in a tailor sit, do the following...

■ Neck rolls

Drop your head slightly to one side. Roll your head forward and then to the other side. (Do not drop your head back during the roll.) Look as far left as you can and hold for a few seconds. Look as far right as you can and hold for a few seconds.



Benefits: Relieves tension in neck and shoulders.

■ Shoulder shrugs

Move or shrug your shoulders to the front and then to the back. Make circles that roll forward at first (5 rotations), then stop and make circles that roll backwards (5 rotations).



Benefits: Relieves tension in shoulders and upper back.

■ Upper body stretch

Cross your arms in front of you at the elbows and feel your upper back stretch.

Inhale slowly and raise your arms toward the ceiling and gradually uncross your arms. Reach upward so you feel the stretch in your entire upper body. Exhale as you lower your arms out to the sides and behind you with palms up. Feel the stretch across your chest and upper arms. With your arms down and behind you, stretch farther by pressing your arms back with 5 gentle pulsing motions.



Exhale with each stretch, making a “who” sound. Drop your arms to your sides and relax without slumping. Repeat 5 times.



Benefits: Relieves tension in the shoulders and under the ribs.

■ **Arm circles**

Stretch your arms out to the side with your palms up. Make little circles with your arms and then gradually make the circles get bigger. Repeat in the opposite direction and then give yourself a hug.

Benefits: Strengthen the upper back and increase circulation.

■ **Leg stretch**

Straighten your legs and lean back slightly. Place a pillow under your thighs if it is more comfortable. Flex and point your feet several times.

Benefits: Promote circulation in the lower extremities.