



Exercises for Strength

Use these exercises to alleviate some discomforts during pregnancy, to strengthen the muscles that will support your extra weight during pregnancy, and to prepare the muscles you will need during labor and delivery.

■ The Butterfly

WITH A PARTNER: Sit on the floor with the soles of your feet together and knees bent and out to the sides. Draw your feet up close to your body. Face your partner (who should be sitting in the same position). Have your partner place their hands under your knees and gently push upward while you push down with your knees. Hold for 10 seconds. Then trade places and you push up on your partner's knees while they push down with their knees. Repeat 5 times.

Your partner should not push down on your knees (only push up). Your partner can increase the upward pressure on your knees as you get stronger.

Benefits: Strengthens thighs and upper arms.

■ The Squat

BY YOURSELF: Stand with your feet comfortably apart and your heels on the floor. Squat, dropping your buttocks down toward the floor. Keep your weight evenly on your heels and toes for greater stability. If you cannot squat with your heels flat, spread your feet further apart, wear shoes with moderate heels, or elevate your heels with two books. If you have trouble keeping your balance, hold a piece of furniture or hold the doorknobs on either side of a door while you squat.



WITH A PARTNER Method #1: Face your partner, standing with your feet shoulder-width apart. Hold on to each other's arms at the elbows. Then, both you and your partner lean back, keeping your backs straight so you can feel a slight tension in your arms. With your toes straight ahead, squat down as far as you can while keeping your heels flat on the floor (your partner should remain standing). Hold the squat and then slowly come back up. Then, your partner should squat while holding onto you.

WITH A PARTNER Method #2: Your partner should sit on a chair. You squat in front with your back to your partner and your arms over their knees.

Repeat 10 times, holding each squat for 30 seconds. Work up to holding squats for 1 minute and 30 seconds each time. Discontinue if squatting causes pain in your legs or pubic area.

Benefits: Strengthens pelvic muscles, strengthens legs, increases flexibility and stretches muscles, builds strength in your upper arms (if done with partner).

■ The Pelvic Tilt

Get on your hands and knees with your hands directly under your shoulders and knees directly under your hips. Your back should be flat, like a table (do not sag or drop below this neutral position). Inhale and look up, exhale and tilt the pelvis by arching the lower back and contracting the abdominal muscles. (Imagine a frightened dog who tucks her tail between her legs).



Repeat 10 times, holding each pelvic tilt for a count of 5-10 and waiting 5-10 seconds between holds.

Benefits: Strengthens back muscles and abdominal muscles. Relieves pressure on lower back, major blood vessels, ureters, and bladder, increases circulation, relieves tension, and improves digestion. In later pregnancy, this exercise helps the baby drop out of the pelvis and can be used before bed for more comfortable sleeping.

■ The Kegel

In any position (e.g. tailor sitting, standing, sitting on a chair/toilet, lying down): Tighten the pelvic floor muscles up towards the uterus. (The pelvic floor muscles are the ones you use to stop the flow of urine when peeing. If you feel your butt, thighs, or abdomen tense up, you are tightening the wrong muscles!).

Try holding for 3-5 seconds – if you feel your pelvic floor muscles relaxing, retighten them. Repeat 10 times. Work up to holding Kegels for 20 seconds or more.

Benefits: The pelvic floor muscles can sag during pregnancy because of the weight of your uterus and the relaxing effects of hormones on your body. Kegel exercises strengthen the pelvic floor and improve circulation. These muscles are also stretched during birth. When they are in good tone, they are elastic – which means they can stretch but also return to their original length.