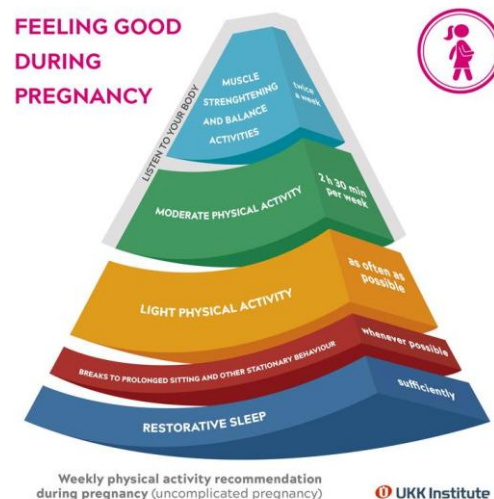


Wellbeing during pregnancy

Exercise during pregnancy

- The UKK Institute's national recommendations provide guidance on how much physical activity you should get each week. This recommendation is intended for pregnant individuals whose pregnancy is progressing normally and who have no medical contraindications to exercise.
- Even light exercise during pregnancy can help prevent problems in the back and pelvic area.



- What should you keep in mind in terms of exercise?
 - If you have not been active before your pregnancy, start slowly.
 - If you were used to high-intensity exercise before becoming pregnant, you should adjust and adapt your workout routine as your pregnancy progresses.
 - As your pregnancy progresses, it is advisable to avoid sports that involve physical contact or pose a risk of injury.
 - Do not scuba dive or travel to high-altitude mountain regions (above 2,500 metres) while pregnant. Decompression sickness and altitude sickness are dangerous for the foetus.
 - Stop exercising if you experience any of the following symptoms: shortness of breath at rest, regular and painful contractions, bleeding, dizziness that does not resolve at rest, a severe headache or calf pain and swelling.

Strength training during pregnancy

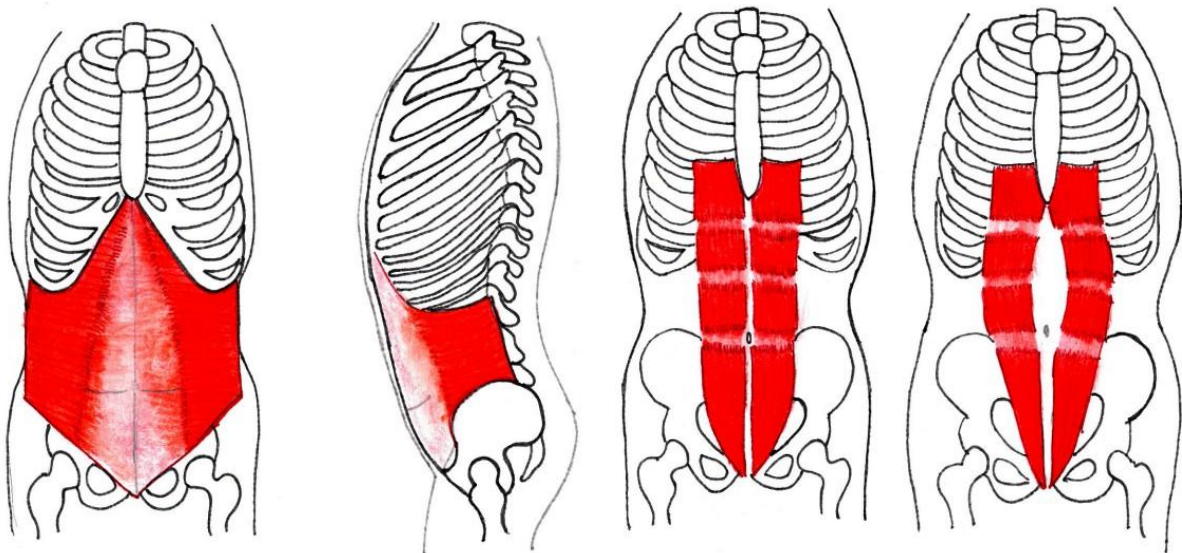
- You can adjust your strength training as your pregnancy progresses and your belly grows. When doing strength training, you should pay attention to core control.
- **During the first trimester (weeks 0–12)**
 - Be mindful of your own limits: if you are feeling tired or nauseous, you can reduce the intensity and duration of your workouts to allow enough time for recovery.
 - Pay attention to how your body feels during explosive or high-impact exercises, such as jumping or running.
 - If you feel well, you can exercise in a variety of ways.
- **During the second trimester (weeks 13–27)**
 - Large movements that require significant physical exertion – such as push-ups, sit-ups and pull-ups – require strong support and control from the core and pelvic floor muscles, which becomes more difficult as pregnancy progresses and pressure in the abdominal cavity increases.
 - When exercising, it is a good idea to adjust your range of motion so that your abdominal wall is not subjected to significant stretching or pressure.
 - Pay attention to the linea alba along the midline of the abdomen to ensure that it does not bulge forwards as a longitudinal ridge.
- **Examples of adjusting your exercise routine as your pregnancy progresses:**
 - Good positions for strength training include standing, lying on your side, on your hands and knees or sitting.
 - You can do exercises performed above the head at a lower level, or perform exercises intended for both arms by using one arm at a time.
 - You can lighten your push-up position by doing it on your hands and knees.
 - You can start replacing explosive and high-impact exercises with other forms of aerobic exercise; for example, you can replace jumping and running with hill walking, stair climbing or water jogging, etc.
- **During the third trimester (weeks 28–40)**
 - The importance of rest and recovery is emphasised.
 - During your workouts, it is a good idea to adjust the tempo, volume, intensity and resistance, focusing on core control.

Deep core support muscles

Pregnancy puts strain on the pelvic floor and the area around the linea alba between the abdominal muscles, so you need to pay special attention to keeping your core in good shape. The pelvic floor muscles and the deep transverse abdominal muscle are voluntary muscles, and you can improve their condition through regular exercise. The deep core muscles support the sacroiliac joints and the pubic symphysis. By strengthening your core muscles during pregnancy, you can help relieve pelvic girdle pain and support your postpartum recovery.

Deep transverse abdominal muscle:

- The deep transverse abdominal muscle supports the core like a corset, working in coordination with the back muscles, diaphragm, pelvic floor muscles, hip flexors, glutes and inner thighs.
- By strengthening the transverse abdominal muscle, you support pelvic floor function and core pressure regulation as the linea alba stretches.



Deep transverse abdominal muscle

Abdominal separation

Exercise for identifying the deep transverse abdominal muscle

As you exhale, tighten your abdomen by drawing in the entire abdominal wall from the bottom up, as if you were pulling up a zip. As you inhale, relax your abdomen. Start the exercises in a position that feels comfortable for you, such as standing, lying on your side with your legs bent, on your hands and knees or lying on your back with your knees bent (in the later stages of pregnancy, lying on your back may feel uncomfortable).

Repeat 5–10 times. Do 2–3 sets. You can do this exercise 2–4 times a day, gently feeling out your muscles as they contract.



Pelvic floor muscles:

- The pelvic floor muscles work together with the deep transverse abdominal muscle, the back muscles, the diaphragm, the hip flexors, the gluteal muscles and the inner thighs.
- You can also exercise your pelvic floor muscles as part of other muscle conditioning training.
- You can practise distinguishing between contraction and relaxation in your pelvic floor through an identification exercise.
- By working out your entire body, you also strengthen your pelvic floor muscles without constantly tensing them.
- Constantly tensing the pelvic floor muscles tires them out and can worsen symptoms of urinary incontinence.

**Pelvic floor identification exercise:**

Gently contract your pelvic floor muscles inwards and upwards. Relax. Try to keep the surrounding muscles as relaxed as possible. Start the exercise in a position that feels natural to you, such as lying on your back with your knees bent, sitting, on your hands and knees, lying on your side or standing. As you get used to the exercise, you can change your position.

Repeat 5–10 times. Do 2–3 sets. You can do this exercise 2–4 times a day, gently feeling out your muscles as they contract and relax.

If you have trouble identifying the contraction and relaxation of your pelvic floor, you can feel it with your finger through your vagina, watch the movement with a mirror or sit on a rolled-up towel to sense the movement.

- Once you get the hang of the identification exercise, you can move on to **comprehensive strength training exercises, such as those described in the workout instructions below.**

Pelvic girdle pain

Symptoms in the lower back and sacroiliac joint area:

- The pain is localised in the lower back and may radiate to the buttocks and lower limbs.
- Symptoms are triggered by prolonged inactivity, such as sitting or lying down for long periods, or walking long distances.
- **Ways to alleviate the symptoms:**
 - Strength training for the core and pelvic region.
 - Mobility training, such as dynamic stretching, prenatal yoga or Pilates.
 - Taking breaks from prolonged sitting and walking.
 - Wearing a support belt while standing or moving.
 - Resting positions.
 - Supporting your body with a pillow while sleeping, and squeezing a pillow between your legs when rolling over.

Pubic symphysis symptoms:

- The pain is localised in the pubic symphysis area at the front of the pelvis.
- Symptoms are triggered by prolonged inactivity, such as sitting or lying down for long periods.
- Symptoms can also be triggered by walking long distances or movements that cause the lower limbs to move apart, such as lunges or walking up and down stairs.
- **Ways to alleviate the symptoms:**
 - Exercises to build muscle strength in the core, hips and inner thighs, such as hip adduction exercises.
 - Mobility training, such as dynamic stretching, prenatal yoga or Pilates.
 - Taking breaks from prolonged sitting and walking.
 - Climbing stairs step by step or sideways, or shortening your stride.
 - Wearing a support belt while standing or moving.
 - Resting positions.
 - Supporting your body with a pillow while sleeping, and squeezing a pillow between your legs when rolling over.
- **At the end, you will find examples of exercises suitable for both strength and mobility training to help manage pelvic girdle pain symptoms. You can choose the exercises that work best for you.**

Resting positions and pelvic floor relaxation

- Rest and recovery are part of maintaining wellbeing during pregnancy.
- Resting positions can help relieve core symptoms and pelvic girdle pain.
- In the final stages of pregnancy, pelvic floor relaxation exercises help prepare the body for childbirth and may facilitate the pushing stage.
- Pelvic floor relaxation exercises performed during pregnancy have a positive effect on muscle relaxation and urinary incontinence.
- Below are examples of different resting positions.





In addition to resting positions and pelvic floor relaxation, wearing a pregnancy support belt can help alleviate pelvic girdle pain or symptoms in the midsection. Wear a support belt while standing or moving. There are various models of support belts available. When rolling over at night, you can benefit from squeezing a pillow between your legs. This engages your muscles during the movement, making it easier to change position.



Examples of muscle conditioning exercises that can help alleviate musculoskeletal symptoms and maintain muscle strength during pregnancy:

1. Exercises in an upright position with a resistance band and activation of the deep abdominal muscles. You can choose the muscle conditioning exercises that work best for you.

A) Rowing exercise with a resistance band

Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Keep the resistance band taut with your arms straight. As you exhale, tighten your abdominal wall while pulling the resistance band by bringing your elbows back. As you inhale, slowly return your hands to the starting position and relax your abdominal muscles.

Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



B) Skiing exercise with a resistance band

Stand with your feet hip-width apart, **leaning forwards, knees bent and back straight**. Keep the resistance band taut with your arms straight. As you exhale, tighten your abdominal wall while pulling the resistance band by extending your arms back while keeping them straight. As you inhale, slowly return your hands to the starting position and relax your abdominal muscles.

Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets. Repeat 2–3 times a week.

**C) Triceps extension with a resistance band over the head**

Stand with your feet hip-width apart, facing away from the anchor point of the resistance band. Hold the resistance band taut with both hands, keeping your elbows bent above your head. As you exhale, tighten your abdominal wall while straightening your elbows. As you inhale, slowly return your hands to the starting position and relax your abdominal muscles.

Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



D) Chest press with a resistance band from the sides

Stand with your feet hip-width apart, facing away from the anchor point of the resistance band. Hold the resistance band taut with both hands. As you exhale, tighten your abdominal wall while pushing forwards and straightening your arms. As you inhale, slowly return your hands to the starting position and relax your abdominal muscles.

Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets. Repeat 2–3 times a week.

**E) Twist with a resistance band**

Stand sideways. Hold the resistance band taut with both hands. Your arms can be almost straight. Keep your hips steady throughout the entire exercise. As you exhale, tighten your abdominal wall while twisting your upper body against the resistance of the resistance band. As you inhale, slowly return your hands to the starting position and relax your abdominal muscles. You can do the exercise alternately on both sides.

Repeat 10 times. Do 2 sets on each side. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



2. Hip lift with pelvic floor activation

Lie down on the floor on your back with your knees bent. Activate your pelvic floor and tighten your lower abdomen. Lift your hips one vertebra at a time, activating your glutes. Gently lower your hips back down. Try to keep your pelvic floor engaged throughout the entire movement and relax the muscles as you lower yourself.

If you like, you can place a ball between your knees to engage your inner thighs. Engaging the inner thighs may help with pubic symphysis pain.

You can do this exercise during your pregnancy for as long as it feels comfortable. If lying on your back makes you feel unwell, it is better to practice in other positions, such as lying on your side or standing.

Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



3. Squat with pelvic floor activation

Stand with your feet hip-width apart. If you like, you can place a ball between your knees to engage your inner thighs. Engaging the inner thighs may help with pubic symphysis pain.

As you exhale, tighten your pelvic floor muscles and squeeze the ball while pushing yourself up from the squat. Relax your pelvic floor while standing and squat back down.

Repeat 10 times. Do 2–3 sets. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



4. Squat exercise to strengthen the sacroiliac joint

Stand in a narrow lunge position with the resistance band under the ball of your front foot. Weight on the front foot. Squat. As you stand up, pull your opposite elbow back past your side.

Repeat 10 times. Do 2–3 sets on each side. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



5. Side-lying hip abduction

Lie on your side. Bend the bottom leg, keep the top leg straight. Support yourself with your top hand against the floor. Lift your top leg upwards, keeping it straight and leading with your heel.

Repeat 10 times. Do 2–3 sets on each side. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



6. Side-lying clamshell exercise with pelvic floor activation

Lie on your side with your knees bent. **If you like, you can add a resistance band to the exercise, placing it just above your knees.** This exercise may help relieve sacroiliac joint pain.

As you exhale, tighten your pelvic floor and abdomen and lift your top knee while keeping your feet together. As you inhale, return to the starting position and relax your pelvic floor and abdomen.

Repeat 10 times. Do 2–3 sets on each side. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



If you experience symptoms in the pubic symphysis, you can perform the exercise in the opposite direction by engaging your inner thighs while squeezing a ball.



7. Core activation on your hands and knees

Get on your hands and knees. As you exhale, tighten your abdomen and extend one leg backwards. As you inhale, bring your leg back and relax your abdomen.

Repeat 10 times. Do 2 sets on each side. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



8. Side plank

Lie on your side with your knees bent. Keep your bottom arm under your shoulder and your top hand on your hip. As you exhale, tighten your abdomen and lift your hips off the floor. As you inhale, return your hips to the starting position and relax your abdomen.

If the exercise is too strenuous or your anterior abdominal wall bulges out to form a ridge, you can do exercises while lying on your side.

Repeat 5 times. Do 2–3 sets on each side. Repeat 2–3 times a week.



Examples of mobility exercises that can help alleviate musculoskeletal symptoms and maintain mobility during pregnancy:

You can choose exercises that work for you and do them in short sessions. These exercises are also a good way to take a break from prolonged sitting, standing or walking.

1. Hip rotations

Stand with your feet spread apart, knees slightly bent. Rotate your hips while relaxing your hips and lower back. You can also do this exercise while sitting on an exercise ball.



2. Angled back and pectoral muscle stretch against a chair on your knees or against a table while standing.

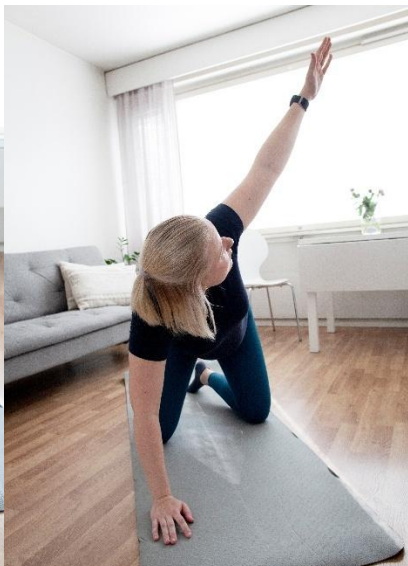


3. **Rotation in an angled stretch.** You can combine the angled stretch with a back rotation by extending your arm sideways, alternating between both sides.



4. **Thread the needle**

Get on your hands and knees. Reach your hand under the armpit of your other arm as far as you can. Continue the motion by rotating the same arm upwards towards the ceiling on the other side of your body. Your upper body twists from side to side as you move. Follow your hand with your eyes. Do the exercise on both sides.



5. Thoracic spine rotation

Lie on your side with your knees bent and your hands behind your head. Twist your upper body gently backwards as far as you can while keeping your hips in place and your knees together. Return to the initial position. Continue the motion. Do the exercise on both sides.

**6. Seated hip rotations**

Sit leaning back slightly on your hands. Rotate your knees from side to side.



7. Cat-cow stretch

Get on your hands and knees, with your hands below your shoulders and your knees below your hips. As you exhale, tighten your abdominal wall and round your back. Your gaze is drawn towards your navel. As you inhale, relax your abdomen and arch your back in a controlled manner, lifting your chin slightly upwards. Continue the motion.

**8. Lateral back bend with hip flexor stretch in a lunge or standing**

Reach your hand towards the ceiling and bend your body from side to side to the rhythm of your calm breaths. Continue the motion. You can also do the lateral bends while sitting cross-legged or in a chair.



9. Inner thigh stretch in a tailor pose

Sit down on the floor. Place the soles of your feet together, bring your heels as close to your hips as possible and stretch your knees towards the floor. If you need to, you can support the position by placing pillows under your knees.

**10. Back rotation while lying on your side**

Lie on your side, resting your head on your bottom arm. Hold your top leg slightly in the air. Reach out with your top hand and leg in opposite directions, alternately in front of and behind your body. Continue the motion. Do the exercise on both sides.



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