

Ask The Experts

Is too much exercise harmful during pregnancy?

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Q I am 32 years old and a first-time mum.

For the first 24 weeks, I was active, walking at least 10,000 steps five times a week, doing simple stretching exercises and planks.

In my 25th week, a sudden onset of preterm contractions (threatened preterm labour) led to hospitalisation. A scan showed that my cervix was borderline short.

Did walking too much or planking cause my cervix to be shorter? How do I prevent this from happening again?

A Women with normal pregnancies are encouraged to exercise to maintain fitness and for a healthy pregnancy.

Exercises such as walking, swimming, yoga and Pilates are suitable for pregnant women.

As a general rule, a pregnant woman can continue doing the exercises she has already been doing pre-pregnancy, with a slight reduction in intensity.

Exercise (such as walking or planking) alone has not been proven to cause preterm labour or cervical shortening.

Pregnant women can consult their obstetricians about how much and what type of exercise is suitable before starting on an exercise regimen.

Conditions that are unsuitable for exercise

However, one has to note that there are some conditions in pregnancy that make exercise unsuitable. These include:

- bleeding during pregnancy;



Consult your obstetrician about how much and what type of workout is suitable before starting on an exercise regimen. PHOTO: ISTOCK

- low-lying placenta;
- known risk of preterm labour; or
- high blood pressure in pregnancy.

In your situation, excessive exercise may be an aggravating factor that could have contributed to preterm labour.

It is advisable for you to limit your physical activity to reduce your risk as you are still at an early gestation.

Excessive walking or other strenuous activities may make your baby's head exert pressure on the cervix, and this may bring on uterine contractions.

Causes for preterm labour

Generally speaking, there are many causes for preterm labour.

Some cannot be modified, such as cervical or uterine abnormalities, being pregnant with twins or triplets, young or advanced maternal age, or a history of previous preterm birth.

Examples of modifiable fac-

tors include cessation of tobacco and alcohol intake and promptly treating any urinary or genital tract infections.

By managing these risk factors, you can lower the risk of preterm labour.

Progesterone medication and tocolytics (medication to reduce or stop uterine contractions) can lower the risk of having a premature delivery. Check with your obstetrician to see if these may be suitable for you.

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