

BY CALUM WILSON

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Childbirth

– Is Your Clients Body Ready?

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRE-NATAL TRAINING AND GETTING CONTROL OF THAT PREGNANCY BUMP!

I BECAME INTERESTED in the effects of exercise during pregnancy six years ago when I first started personal training. For a new kid on the block, it is always good to see what other trainers are doing and which ones are doing it well. I quickly realised that the most successful, busiest and most talked-about trainer had a niche: he was regarded as the best pre- and post-natal trainer in the country.

This is not only a highly satisfying and rewarding area, but also a very lucrative one. I soon put into place a plan to learn from the best, and never looked back.

There are two schools of thought about the effect of training on the baby: the conservative and the liberal.

The conservative school, which still includes most health-care professionals, feels that exercise during pregnancy is potentially harmful and therefore recommends a restrictive, cautious approach to exercise for healthy, pregnant woman. This view springs mainly from the belief that to harvest a healthy baby, the mother should be put under as little stress as possible; the more stress the body is under during exercise, the more negative effects it might have on the foetus.

The liberal school is mainly represented by younger woman who have exercised regularly during one or more of their pregnancies. These women believe that strenuous physical activity during pregnancy is not only normal but also helpful, and they recommend it to healthy woman to improve the course and outcome of their pregnancies.

This school is definitely where I study. My views about this hark back to the Stone Age, and will be familiar to fans of barefoot running and the Paleo diet. Back in the Stone Age, pregnant woman would have

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do a great deal more than in today's society, and our species still survived. They lived in a far more hostile world where there were much greater stressors on the body. They were certainly not worried about their heart rates going over 140 beats per minute when being chased by a sabre-toothed tiger. We are far more durable than some people give us credit for.

Benefits of pre-natal training Hopefully, most of you will agree that exercising when pregnant is safe for both mother and child. It is important to highlight all the beneficial effects that occur because of training. As a personal trainer, when I refer to exercise, I am talking about resistance weights. Although I would still encourage pregnant woman to undergo ante-natal yoga or Pilates, I certainly would not recommend either as their only form of exercise.

So, why should (and why does) a woman train during her pregnancy? Most will tell you it is for the health and wellbeing of her baby; others have always trained and will continue as normal, and some will train in an attempt to get back their pre-baby body.

All three reasons are great, and it is important to take the initiative during the pregnancy stage. Training post-natal women for more than six years has made me appreciate that sometimes the damage has already been done. If they didn't train during their pregnancy and gained an excessive amount of weight, the damage could be irreversible. Even though they might be able to regain their pre-baby weight after some hard work, they may have been unable to regain their skin-tone due to the skin over-stretching, and losing its ability to regain its elasticity.

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One of the major benefits of exercise during pregnancy is to maintain a healthy weight, resulting in regaining her pre-pregnancy weight-level more quickly. James Clapp, an internationally recognised maternal exercise researcher and obstetrician, showed that women who exercised for three hours or more per week weighed, on average, 3.6kg less than the control group.

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He also tested the skin-fold measurements and found that body-fat mass increases approximately 3 per cent less in woman who continued regular weight-bearing exercise, and the more exercise these woman did in late pregnancy, the greater the effect on minimising both weight gain and fat retention.

The consequence is that women who continue to exercise maintain a leaner appearance throughout pregnancy. They don't look grossly pregnant. This helps many women with their body image during pregnancy.

Regaining her pre-baby body is not the only benefit of resistance training to women; others include decreasing the likelihood of incontinence after having a baby, which actually affects one in three women in Australia. Incontinence is a significant problem for some women, and it can be due to the lack of strength in the lower abdominals and pelvic floor muscles.



Dr Arnold Kegel, who pioneered exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor, says that exercises are an integral part of all pre- and post-natal programs helping to strengthen this region. Dr Carolyn Nygaard, licensed naturopathic physician and midwife, found that 4 per cent of woman who lifted weights suffered incontinence, compared to 38% of runners.

Training has also been shown to help alleviate back pain which can be very common during pregnancy due the increase in overall mass and the change in the centre of gravity. Exact postural changes vary; however, generally, there is an exaggeration of the curve in the lumbar spine which can lead to the back muscles being placed under too much stress, leading to pain. It was originally thought that following a birth, a woman's posture returns to the way that it was pre-pregnancy, but some studies have shown that the posture after pregnancy is not significantly different to that developed during the later stage of pregnancy.

Other positive effects of exercise include better preparation of a woman's body for childbirth as she becomes stronger and has increased cardiovascular fitness. The resulting increase in endorphins has also been shown to help with cases of pre- or post-natal depression and to counteract body-image concerns. Finally, exercise teaches your clients all the movement patterns they will need when they have a new infant, such as squats, lunges and dead lifts.

LEARN THE BASICS

Before any client undergoes any exercise program, it is always important to pre-screen them – especially if the client is pregnant. There are multiple contraindications to consider before training such clients which include a history of three or more spontaneous miscarriages, a diagnosed multiple pregnancy and a ruptured membrane. For a full list of cases where exercise should not be undertaken, go to www.acog.org/. Creating the basic training program for before the first trimester Here is an example of a program for all those clients who might be planning on having a baby but have not fallen pregnant yet. It is a safe program, but I would firmly recommend referring your client to a qualified natal trainer once she has conceived. **APP**

EXERCISE	REPS	SETS	TEMPO	REST	NOTES
Dead lift & row	15–20	3	3.1.1.1	60–75	
Squats & woodchop	15 ES	3	3.1.1.1	60–75	ES = each side
Lunge & twist	15 EL	3	3.1.1.1	60–75	EL = each leg
SLB roll	15	2	3.1.1.1	60–75	
Horse st	10 ES	2	3.1.1.1	60–75	
Fwd Swiss ball roll	12	2	3.1.1.1	60–75	