

NOTE: Refer to module outline for goal, objectives, class outline, equipment, resources required, and references.

If this is the first class:

- Welcome participants to class.
- Housekeeping: bathroom, breaks, length of session, ground rules/respect.
- Have each couple or individual pair up with another couple or individual and introduce themselves to each other. (Consider including name, due date, HCP, something they are looking forward to, something they are nervous about and/or anything they would like to share about the pregnancy). Then have the pairs or individuals introduce each other to the rest of the group.
- Provide the choice of prenatal handout (depending on your organization, this may be *Healthy Beginnings* or *A Healthy Start for Baby and Me*) for each expectant mother.
- Provide a list of community resources.
- It is best to advise participants during the first session that you have a duty to report any concerns about the safety or well-being of a child (including the witnessing of abuse of the mother) to child protective services. (This is only applicable if there are children in the home already.)

Suggestion for the Facilitator: on a flip chart, list the topics to be discussed in this session.

- Pregnancy and stress, anxiety and depression
- Coping strategies
- Benefits of active living
- Guidelines for exercising safely
- Relaxation activity
- Additional resources

Pregnancy and Stress



Facilitator Notes:

- Pregnancy is a time of great change. Your body is changing. People may treat you differently. Your relationships with family and friends are changing. You are beginning to form a relationship with your baby. What you are experiencing is normal. Although pregnancy is a happy time for many, all these changes and adjustments can increase your stress level and affect all aspects of your life.
- Pregnancy provides an opportunity to look at your lifestyle and identify what causes you stress and what stressors you can cope with. Understanding your reaction to challenging events is the first step in developing some positive coping strategies.
- Partners may also experience stress. The stress may come from health concerns related to the pregnancy, anxiety toward the parenting role, from financial worries, etc. Partners also need to find healthy ways to cope with stress. For resources specific to fathers, see Dad Central (www.dadcentral.ca).

Note to Facilitator: do not discuss woman abuse in a mixed group setting where the partner is present. If a second facilitator is available, consider dividing the group in two (pregnant women, partners) for the activity ‘Stress Coping Strategies’ and use that opportunity to discuss abuse issues with the pregnant women. The following resource may be helpful to the facilitator:

Best Start Resource Centre. (2016). *Abuse in Pregnancy – Information and Strategies for the Prenatal Educator*. www.beststart.org/resources/anti-violence/pdf/bs_abuse_lr_f.pdf

Ling



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Read the story:

Ling is 29 years old and expecting her first baby. She is not in a stable relationship with her baby's father. Her pregnancy was not planned, however, she is looking forward to being a mother. Ling's parents live in China, but she has one sister who lives nearby. She is close to her sister and they talk daily and see each other on weekends. Ling works about eight hours a day as an information specialist and must commute 60 minutes each way to get to her job. During her commute, she listens to music or relaxation CDs and ensures she has nutritious snacks and water in the car. Since she spends the majority of time at her computer station, she makes time to get up and move around throughout the day. During lunch hour, Ling participates in a worksite yoga class or goes for a 20 minute walk with her co-workers. To end her day, she unwinds by reading a novel and tries to get as many hours of sleep as she can each night.



Suggested Activity: Stressors and Strategies

Materials: Flipchart (optional)

Instructions: Ask the participants to identify potential stressors in Ling’s life and highlight the positive coping strategies she uses.

Potential stressors

- Unplanned pregnancy
- No committed partner
- Limited support systems
- Living away from family
- Long working hours
- Sitting for long periods

Positive Coping Strategies

- Close relationship with sister
- Has weekends off
- Has supportive co-workers
- Incorporates daily physical activity (stretch breaks, yoga, walking)
- Gets adequate rest and sleep
- Makes time to “decompress” (relaxation CDs, reading, music, yoga)
- Aware of importance of healthy eating

Good Stress / Bad Stress



- Recognizing triggers
- Using coping skills
- Short-term stress can be beneficial

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Facilitator Notes:

- Stress does not have to be all bad. When a pregnant woman recognizes her triggers for stress and manages them properly, stress can provide her with the drive to handle life's challenges. Not all situations that are identified as being stressful are negative. For example, the birth of a baby is a stressful but positive event. Feeling unprepared for parenthood causes some degree of negative stress.
- Everyone perceives situations differently and each person has different coping skills. When something happens to us, we decide (either consciously or sub-consciously) at that moment whether or not we have the coping skills to meet the demands of that situation. The "flight or fight" response is triggered when we determine that these demands exceed our coping skills or when we cannot anticipate what will happen. This response initiates the release of stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) which cause rapid breathing, elevated heart rate and anxiety. Unresolved, it can cause anxiety and depression.
- In the short term, stress does not cause harm and can actually be beneficial by boosting energy and helping to effectively deal with "daily hassles." However, long-term continual stress can affect both physical and emotional well-being (i.e., high blood pressure, preterm labour, depression, etc.).

Suggested Activity: Test Your Stress Index

Material: Booklet *Coping with Stress* from the Canadian Mental Health Association

Instructions:

- Provide participants with a copy of *Coping with Stress* booklet and have them complete *Test Your Stress Index* on page 2.
- <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/-/media/pdf-files/canada/other/coping-with-stress-en.ashx>
- An alternative is the online version from PsychCentral: <https://psychcentral.com/quizzes/stress-test.htm>

Pregnancy Stress

- Physical discomforts
- Hormonal changes
- Health of mother & baby
- Coping with labour & delivery
- Becoming a parent
- Changing relationships
- Financial concerns



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Facilitator Notes:

Pregnancy creates unique stressors for the pregnant woman and her partner. Continual stress can constrict blood vessels to the placenta, thereby decreasing blood flow and nutrients to the baby. Chronic anxiety and worry may increase your chances of preterm labour and low birth weight.

- Physical discomforts, such as nausea, fatigue, back ache, weight gain, and growing pregnancy can impact on day-to-day activities, especially if the pregnant woman expects to accomplish the same things she did before.
- While mood swings are common and normal during pregnancy, they may make it more difficult to cope with stress.
- Many pregnant women and their partners also worry about the health of their baby, particularly if the pregnancy is high risk.
- Fear of the unknown generates anxiety around the birthing process and how the pregnant woman will cope (pain level, pain management, medical procedures, loss of control over oneself). This becomes stronger in the later phases of the pregnancy.
- Becoming a parent makes the pregnant woman and her partner reflect on how they were parented and their ability to become a “good” parent. They may reflect on their relationships and roles with their own parents.
- Relationships with your partner, family, friends, and co-workers will change throughout the pregnancy and after the birth of the baby. If you have a partner, it is important to discuss your changing relationship, your priorities for raising your child, and the sharing of household tasks and baby care.
- The financial responsibility of having a baby may create stress related to the additional costs of purchasing a car seat, crib, and other items. Furthermore, the potential for decreased income during maternity/parental leave is another source of stress for many families. Having a financial plan and creating a budget can help reduce some of the financial stress.

More Than Mood Swings

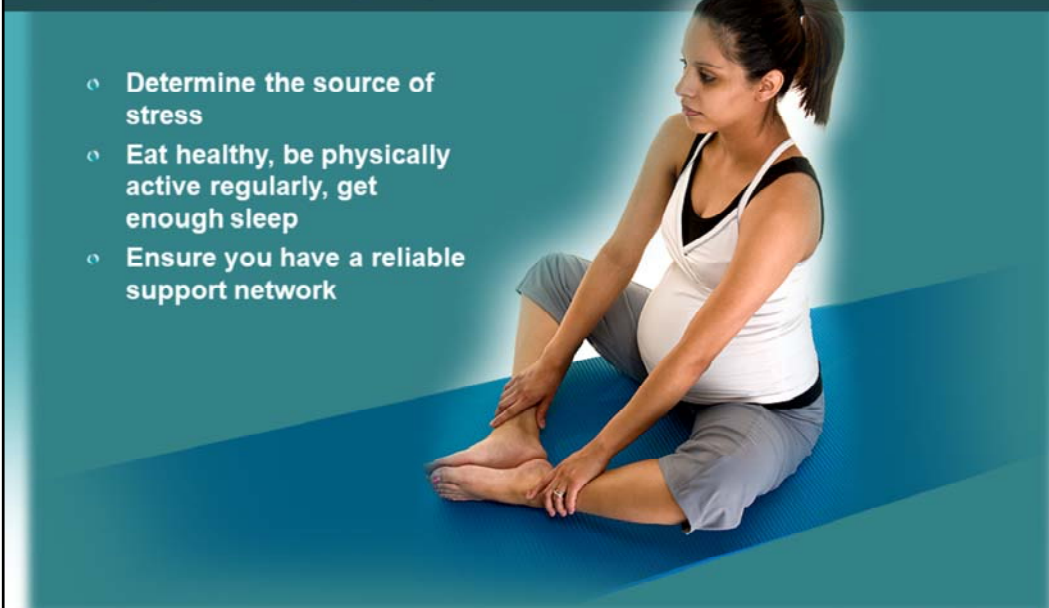
- Most of the time within the two last weeks...
 - Have you been sad, depressed or irritable?
 - Have you been unable to enjoy the things you used to enjoy?
 - Have you felt anxious, worried or panicky?
 - Have you cried more easily?
- Have you experienced any recent losses or stressful life events?
- Do you have a history of depression, anxiety or other mental health challenge?


Facilitator Notes:

- Your mood swings are directly related to your changing hormone levels. Mood swings are most common during the first trimester (6th-10th week) and then again in the third trimester.
- While heightened emotions are normal in pregnancy, there may be times when they interfere with your daily life and relationships. Consider these questions and talk to your health care provider if you answer yes to any of them (see slide). Prenatal depression that is not dealt with can continue on into the postpartum period.
- It is also important to remember that symptoms of depression are often confused with common pregnancy symptoms. For example, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, and difficulty concentrating may be signs of prenatal anxiety and depression.
- About 15 – 20% of pregnant women experience symptoms of prenatal depression and anxiety and many of these may require some type of assistance and treatment.

Strategies for Coping

- Determine the source of stress
- Eat healthy, be physically active regularly, get enough sleep
- Ensure you have a reliable support network



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Facilitator Notes:

- The first step in coping with stress is to identify what is causing the anxiety. Once you have recognized the source you can develop an effective way to manage it.
- Drinking alcohol, smoking, or using drugs are not an effective way to cope with stress, in particular during pregnancy! Some agencies such as Pregnets and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health can provide non-judgmental support to help overcome addictions.
- You can take care of your mental health by:
 - Taking time to relax.
 - Getting enough sleep.
 - Accepting help.
 - Eating a healthy diet.
 - Being physically active.
 - Seeing your health care provider regularly.
 - Seeking help and treatment if you feel emotionally or physically unwell.
- Building a support network. Having a good support network during pregnancy and after the birth of the baby is vital. Your support team can provide you with information, emotional support, and help you with tasks around your home. Sharing the joys, problems, and worries of pregnancy with someone you trust can make your pregnancy less stressful. Remind participants of programs offered at public health units, community health centres, mom and baby groups, etc.



Suggested Activity: Stress Coping Strategies

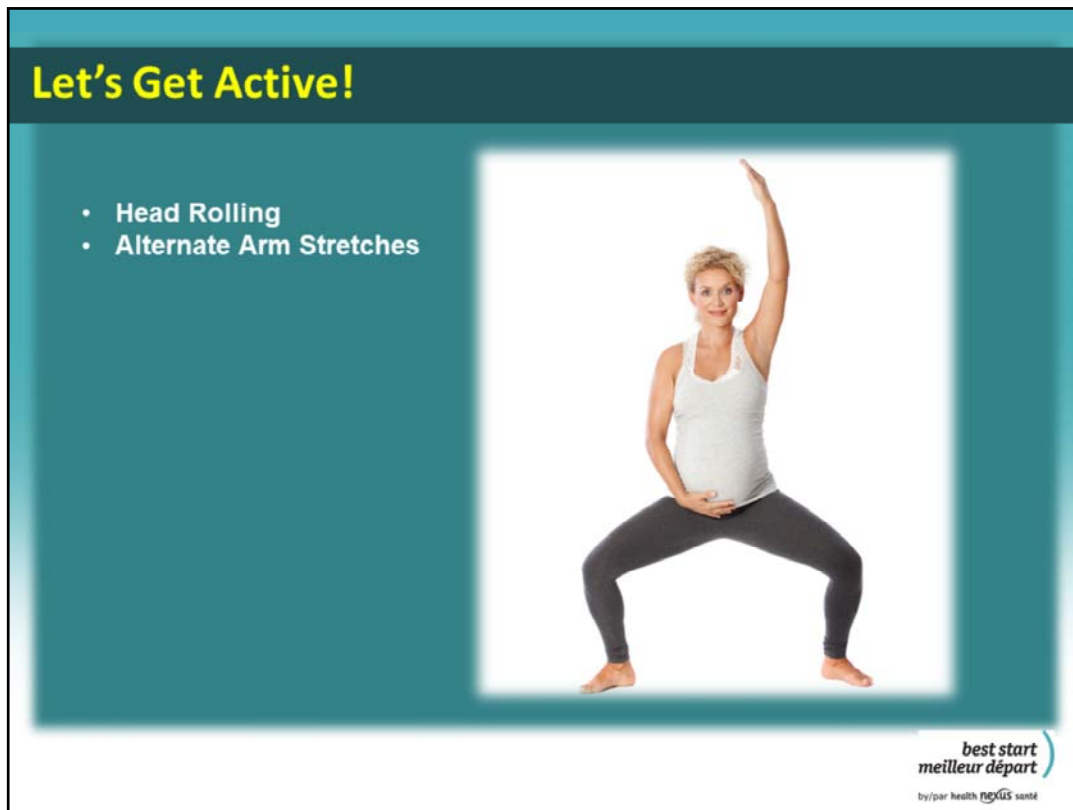
Purpose: To encourage participants to explore their personal coping strategies.

Materials: Flipchart and Markers

Instructions:

Note: If the group is large, the discussion can take place in two smaller groups, with a spokesperson writing suggestions on the flipchart.

- Ask participants how they feel in stressful situations, such as being caught in a traffic jam when they are running late for an important appointment or event. Which are the good and bad strategies?
- Ask participants to list some relaxation strategies they use and write them on a flipchart. If the following suggestions are not mentioned, provide them yourself:
 - Practice relaxation (yoga, meditation, deep breathing, or massage).
 - Ask for specific help from others (Asking for general help is often not effective at reducing stress, as it puts you in the role of “begging” rather than “choosing”. It puts the onus on the giver to figure out what help is needed. Asking for a specific type of help from someone is more likely to be granted and makes for a more positive experience all around.)
 - Prioritize tasks and do one thing at a time.
 - Do something you enjoy everyday (see a movie, listen to music, read a book).
 - Celebrate each milestone in your pregnancy.
 - Get active (e.g., go for a walk outside or inside a mall).
 - Laugh and be with people you enjoy.
 - Attend prenatal classes to learn more about pregnancy, birth, and parenting.
- Remind participants to talk to their health care provider if they need extra support to help them cope with stress. The health care provider may provide treatment, suggest other sources of support, or recommend a medical leave or work modification if stress becomes unmanageable.



Suggested Activity: Let's Get Active!

Purpose: To understand the benefits of prenatal physical activity and get some ideas of safe activities.

Material: Audio-visual equipment to play a DVD or a music CD.

- 1) Show portions of *Move for Two* prenatal exercise DVD (Middlesex London Health Unit). OR
- 2) Have class participate in the following exercises with music. Link exercises with coping with labour pains.

Instructions:

- Ask participants to stand and ensure each person has enough space to move.
- Provide instructions for participants to engage in the following 5 activities (continues on next slide).

a) Head Rolling helps to warm-up and relax neck muscles.

- With mouth open slightly, jaw relaxed, drop chin to chest.
- Roll head slowly from left shoulder, down in front, then to right shoulder.
- Repeat exercise 10 times.

b) Alternate Arm Stretches helps to relieve pressure on blood vessels and nerves in the arm.

- Keep your back straight while sitting or standing.
- Slowly reach overhead with right arm and then left arm.
- Repeat 10 times alternating arm.

Let's Get Active!



- Sitting Pelvic Tilts
- Standing Hamstring Stretch
- Ankle Circles

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c) Sitting Pelvic Tilts strengthen abdominal muscles to help ease pressure and backache and to improve posture.

- Sit in a straight back chair with feet firmly planted on floor.
- Tilt your pelvis by pulling in abdominal muscles and squeezing buttocks together.
- Relax your shoulders and hold that position for a few seconds then release.
- Repeat 10 times.

d) Standing Hamstring Stretch helps to strengthen thigh and calf muscles.

- Stand with one leg bent and the other semi straight.
- Flex your foot on the leg that is extended.
- Bend forward slowly until you feel a stretch in the hamstrings on the semi-straight leg.
- Place your hands on your thighs or against a wall for balance.
- Hold to a count of 30 and repeat on other leg.

e) Ankle Circling strengthens ankle, shin, upper thigh, and abdominal muscles.

- Sit in a chair with back straight and abdomen pulled in.
- Extend left leg and begin to rotate foot slowly in a circular motion 5 times.
- Repeat in opposite direction.
- Repeat sequence with other foot.

Pregnant and Active



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Suggested Activity: Being Active Together

Purpose: To show that there are ways to be active as a couple during pregnancy.

Materials: None.

Instructions:

- Ask the partners to mention some of the physical activities they are doing with their pregnant partner currently.
- If very few suggestions are offered, have the group brainstorm additional ideas that are realistic for their lifestyle. Get them to be specific: if they say “walking together”, ask what is a good time of day or week to do that, where can you go, etc. Have them identify how they could incorporate more walking into their day (i.e. taking the stairs, walking around the block at lunch, park farther away, use a step tracker to count daily steps).

Facilitator Notes:

Remind participants they don't have to go to the gym to be active. Physical activity can easily be added to the daily routine. Being active is a fun way to meet new people and is a great way to spend time with your partner or friends. It can set the stage for active family living.

Some physical activities you may enjoy during pregnancy include, among others:

- Walking.
- Jogging.
- Swimming.
- Dancing.
- Stationary bicycling.
- Housework.

You may also enjoy wellness activities such as meditation, visualization, and deep breathing. They can reduce your stress level and be useful during labour and birth to decrease the intensity of pain.

Benefits of Active Living



- Less stress
- More energy
- More oxygen for your baby
- Better posture
- A healthy weight gain
- Less risk of developing pregnancy-related diabetes or high blood pressure
- An easier recovery after birth

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Facilitator Notes:

Physical activity during pregnancy can lead to:

- Less stress.
- More energy.
- More oxygen for your baby.
- Better posture.
- A healthy weight gain.
- Less risk of developing pregnancy-related diabetes or high blood pressure.
- An easier recovery after birth.

As an added benefit, attending prenatal exercise classes may provide the pregnant woman with an opportunity to increase her social supports by meeting other women. Partner support of these activities is important.

Physical Activity Guidelines

- Discuss with your health care provider
- If already active, continue 150 min week, min. 3 days, moderate intensity
- If inactive, build gradually
- Pelvic floor exercises (Kegel)
- Warm up before and stretch after
- Modify routine as needed
- Drink and eat enough



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Facilitator Notes:

Women are encouraged to be physically active throughout their pregnancy, but it is important to consider the following guidelines:

- Speak to your health care provider before changing or beginning an exercise routine.
- If you do not have medical conditions that prevent you from exercising during pregnancy and if you are already physically active (i.e., you exercise for 150 minutes per week at moderate or vigorous intensity), you can continue to accumulate 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise over a minimum of three days per week.
- Moderate-intensity exercise raises your heart rate and leaves you slightly out of breath. If you are unable to talk and carry on a conversation during exercise, is it too intense.
- If you do not already exercise but would like to, it is best to gradually work up to at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise over a minimum of three days per week.
- Pelvic floor exercises, during pregnancy and after birth, can help reduce the risk of urinary incontinence.
- Always warm up your muscles before exercising. Stretch for 10 to 15 minutes after your activity.
- Inform your fitness instructor or personal trainer about the pregnancy and modify the existing exercise routine appropriately. (Note: not all trainers/instructors have experience with pregnant women and may not be knowledgeable about the necessary modifications for exercise in pregnancy.)
- Drink plenty of water throughout the activity—before, during and after.
- Ensure adequate nutrition to meet the increased energy needs of exercise and prevent low blood sugar.

Tips for Exercising Safely

- Avoid activities where you could fall or injure yourself
- Don't exercise on your back after 4 months.
- Pay attention to your body.



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Facilitator Notes:

- Not all activities are safe during pregnancy. High-intensity activities, heavy lifting, and activities which could cause you to fall or injure yourself should be avoided.
- Physical activities which you should avoid during pregnancy include:
 - Horseback riding.
 - Downhill skiing.
 - Hockey.
 - Gymnastics.
 - Mountain biking.
 - Scuba diving.
- After your fourth month (16 weeks) of pregnancy, change any exercises that you would normally do on your back. You may be able to do them on your side, or while you are standing or sitting. Lying on your back can decrease the amount of blood flow to your baby.
- Do not perform any abdominal exercise if you have Diastasis Recti (soft tissue between the abdominal muscles).
- When you are exercising, listen to your body and know when to stop.
- Being active takes slightly more effort during pregnancy. You may tire a bit faster than before. Your baby is growing, and this takes energy. Your body is also changing, which affects what you can do. You should not go over a specific heart rate zone which corresponds to your age, current activity level, and weight. Pregnancy is also not the time to train for an athletic competition.
- Try not to get too hot. Avoid hot yoga, the use of hot tubs and saunas, and prolonged time periods outside in the sun.

Review or hand out the Active Pregnancy booklet developed by the Physical Activity Resource Centre (PARC) available at: <http://parc.ophea.net/resource/active-pregnancy>. Pay special information to the information on safety guidelines (page 4) and hear rate zones (page 7).

Knowing When to STOP

- Dizziness or fainting.
- Blurred vision.
- Excessive shortness of breath.
- Chest pain.
- Abnormally high heart rate that does not drop when the activity is stopped.
- Pain or edema in the calves.
- Sudden swelling of hands, face, or feet.
- Sudden change in body temperature.
- Strong, sharp pain in the pubis, back, abdomen, or chest.
- Painful uterine contractions.
- Vaginal bleeding.
- Any gush of fluid from the vagina.



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Facilitator Notes:

Review bullet points with participants. Emphasize the need to stop exercising immediately and seek medical attention if any of the above symptoms occur.

Mention that if they are attending a gym or fitness center, to be aware that the fitness leader may not have any experience with pregnancy. Find a trainer who is certified in pregnancy and postpartum exercise program.

Note: It is important to reinforce the message about women listening to their bodies. Some fitness enthusiasts may tend to push themselves beyond their limits in order to achieve a higher fitness level. In pregnancy this is not appropriate and can be harmful.

Physical Activity & Pregnancy Video



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Show a video that summarizes the information seen previously.

Recommended video from Middlesex-London Health Unit, with Dr. Michelle Mottola:
Available from <https://youtu.be/SsEKcpnviVg> and also found on MLHU website:
<https://www.healthunit.com/physical-activity-pregnancy>

Relaxation



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Suggested Activity: Relaxation

Purpose: To show couples one way of relaxing.

Materials: CD with soft music or environmental sounds and a progressive relaxation script or guided imagery script (e.g. The Sea, provided in module outline). Audio-visual equipment to play the CD.

Instructions:

- Play soft music or environmental sounds and read a progressive relaxation script or a guided imagery exercise.
- You may choose to dim the lights.
- These activities can be done lying or sitting.

Mention that those are possibilities and may not work for everyone. Encourage the partners to also seek healthy ways to relax.

For More Information

- Health care provider
- Public health department
- PARmed-X for Pregnancy - www.csep.ca
- Local fitness centres
- Prenatal fitness programs
- Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
- www.sogc.org
- Dad Central – www.dadcentral.ca

The information represents the
best practice guidelines at the time of publication.
The content is not officially endorsed by the Government of Ontario.
Consult your health care provider for information specific to your pregnancy.



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