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# 5 Exercises You Can Do While Pregnant

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*1st Edition*

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# Introduction

This eBook will give you an insight into several safe exercises you can do when you're pregnant. Regular gentle exercise can help you decrease lower back pain and improve your overall well-being, while you are going through your pregnancy.

For me as a chiropractor, it's important to work with our patients in order to treat problems without medicine or surgery whenever possible.

I have a special interest in working on the musculoskeletal system and enjoy helping expecting mothers find comfort through natural pain management. Pregnancy results in many postural changes as your baby grows. The hormone relaxin results in a loosening of ligaments after the second month, so good posture and gentle strengthening exercises are essential in providing optimal support for your spine and pelvis.

Whatever your personal situation, please bear in mind that this eBook or the content on our website do not replace the individual, customised advice you will get from your health practitioner. Our intention is to share as much information as possible and show you how to self-manage and improve your health naturally.

If you suffer from back or joint pain, see your health practitioner *first* before commencing any exercise program. If you feel pain during any of these exercises, stop and consult your practitioner.

# Warm-up with the Cat/Cow

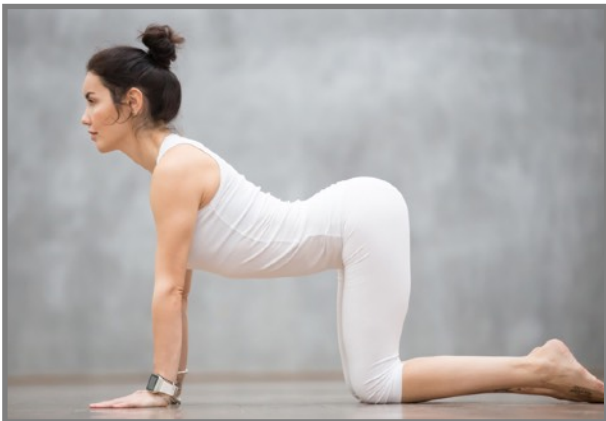
Before doing any exercises, it is imperative to always warm-up. If you don't, you are at risk of straining your back muscles and experiencing back pain. This warm-up exercise is great for limbering and relaxing your spinal muscles and discs. The Cat/Cow is a yoga exercise that has been used for thousands of years. It is still recommended because it is so effective.

This exercise is also known as your 'first-aid' exercise. This means that if you feel back pain during any exercise or activity during the day, simply stop and perform several gentle repetitions of the Cat/Cow. It also works wonders after you have been sitting for prolonged periods!

## How to begin

**Perform your floor exercises on a carpeted floor or exercise mat. If you have a knee problem, kneel on the bed.**

Kneel on all fours, knees hip-width apart. Align your shoulders over your hands and your hips over your knees. Your hands are flat facing forward. Ensure you feel balanced and stable before going any further.



## Exercise Routine

Firstly, breathe in, start exhaling while you arch your back up towards the ceiling while lowering your head and looking between your knees. This position creates an upward arch of the spine and is done during exhalation.

Now, breathe in while hollowing your back towards the floor and bringing your head up to look at the wall in front of you.

You should look like a cat, who is bending its back for stretching. Remember to breathe in while your head comes up, and out while you arch up and lower your head. Breathe smoothly, gently contract your lower abdomen towards your spine and make the arching movements smooth and relaxed.

**Repetitions:**

This warm-up exercise is best done in the morning after you have been up and about for a while. 8-10 slow repetitions are sufficient.

Do another set in the afternoon or evening to ease any spinal tension which builds up during the day.

Remember that during the changing stages of pregnancy your ability to perform various exercises will vary. This exercise is considered to be very effective throughout your entire 9 months, all the way into labour!

# 1. Quadruped Single-Leg Raise

This exercise will improve the endurance of your back muscles, which is crucial during pregnancy. The quadruped is one of the most important safe back strengthening exercises.



## How to begin

Kneel on all fours, hands facing forward and shoulder width apart. Once again, ensure that you have full stability before proceeding further.

## Exercise Routine

**It is important to** keep your lower abdominal muscles tight and pelvis level during the entire manoeuvre. The aim is to move in a slow, controlled manner while breathing throughout each movement. You must lengthen your spine and look straight down in order to keep your neck and spine properly aligned.

Always draw your lower abdominals in towards your spine to engage your lower core. And breathe from the diaphragm throughout the exercise. NEVER hold your breath.

## Basic exercise - legs only

Extend and raise one leg behind you as far as possible. The length you will be able to stretch your leg will vary depending on the stage of your pregnancy. Ideally, you want to gradually be able to have your leg be at the level of your waist.

Hold for 6 seconds, slowly lower the leg back to the kneeling position and repeat on the other side.

Advanced Quadruped - The alternate arm/leg raise.

After performing the legs-only quadruped for a couple of weeks, you can finish a set by trying one or two reps of the alternate arm/leg version. This places a bit more demand on your spinal muscles and results in further gains in strength.

Simply raise and extend the opposite arm to your raised leg. The aim is to keep your entire body parallel and level to the floor.

After a while, you can do the advanced quadruped (alternate arm/leg) and leave the basic legs-only exercise behind.

### **Repetitions**

I recommend that you start with 3-4 repetitions and progress to 10-12 repetitions as your strength and endurance builds. Try to hold each rep for 5-6 seconds, either with the arm raise or without, depending on your capabilities.

You only need to do this exercise once a day. But some adventurous souls find it so helpful they will do it several times a day! Remember, focus on good form and slow movements.

## 2. Plié Squats

Plié Squat (also known as a Chair Squat) is an exercise will strengthen the muscles in your thighs, bottom and hips as well as improve your balance.



### **How to begin**

Standing parallel to a solid chair, rest your closest hand on the top of the chair and stand with your feet about hip distance apart. Point your toes slightly outwards.

### **Exercise routine**

Firstly, pull your belly button slightly up and inwards towards your spine (as best you can while pregnant, without causing discomfort). Then, bending your knees, lower your trunk as low as is comfortable while keeping your back straight. Straighten your legs to return to the starting position to complete one repetition. Be sure to push through your heels (not the balls of your feet) as this ensures the most effective use of your muscles and joints.

### **Repetitions:**

I suggest one set of 6 - 12 repetitions. After a couple of weeks you can do 2 sets. Begin the 2nd set with 6 repetitions and work up to 12. Remember to rest for a couple of minutes between sets.

You can increase the depth of your squats as you progress further into the repetitions. But your thighs only need to go parallel to the floor - no lower.



### 3. Outer Thigh and Hip Abductors



The side-lying outer thigh exercise is designed to strengthen both your hip abductors and out thigh.

#### **How to begin**

Lie on your left side, with your head supported by your forearm. Bend your left leg and keep your right leg straight. Place your opposite arm on the floor for stability.

#### **Exercise routine**

Keep your pelvis perpendicular to the floor and tighten your lower abdominals during this exercise. Raise your straight right leg to above hip height. Keep it slightly behind your body as you raise it. Lower slowly and repeat for several repetitions. Switch sides and repeat the cycle to form one set.

#### **Repetitions:**

Aim for 6 -12 repetitions, focusing on slow and controlled movements. Progress to a second round of 6-12 reps as you get stronger.

## 4. Biceps Curl

The biceps curl is a classic exercise that will build muscle tone and strength in the front of your arms.



### **How to begin**

Sitting on the edge of a chair with your chest lifted and shoulders back and down. Hold a dumbbell in each hand (1-2 kgs) weight in each hand with your palms facing inward. Slowly bend one elbow and lift the dumbbell toward your shoulder. As you lift, rotate your forearm so your palm faces up.

Hold. Slowly lower the dumbbell as you rotate your arm back to the starting position. Up and down is one rep. Finish all reps and then repeat with the other arm.

When you have completed both arms, you have done one set.

Remember to:

- Keep your abs tight
- Breathe throughout the cycles

- Sit tall and straight
- Shoulders back and down

### **Exercise routine**

Bend your elbows by flexing your arm and lifting the weights to shoulder height. Slowly lower your arms down to your sides then straighten them and return to your starting position.

### **Repetitions:**

I suggest one set of ten reps to start.

You can increase this to 2 and then 3 sets as you gain strength. Remember that the lowering phase is more important in building strength than the curling/lifting phase. Make your movements slow and controlled.

## 5. One Arm Row

The one arm row will strengthen your upper back and arm muscles.



### **How to begin**

With your left foot on the floor, place your right knee on the seat of a sturdy chair. Bend forward with your back parallel to the floor and put your right hand on the seat of the chair.

Hold a 1- 2 kilo weight in your left hand with your arm extended down to the floor, in line with your shoulder. Make sure your palm is facing inwards.

### **Exercise routine**

Lift the weight up from the floor and hold it alongside your waist (in line with your belt or pocket). Your left elbow will form a 90-degree angle and your upper arm will be parallel to the floor and in line with your torso. Hold for a count of five then lower back to starting position.

## **Repetition**

I recommend 5 - 10 reps on each side. Remember to control the movement and move slowly. You must breathe throughout the exercise.

Increase to 2-3 sets of 10 reps over the next 2-3 months.

You can also increase the actual weight as you get stronger. Never overstrain!

## **Conclusion**

I have been working with patients as a chiropractor for over 40 years. We always advise that you build in regular exercise between your chiropractic sessions. Remember to do these exercises three times a week, with a rest day in between. You can walk, swim or cycle on your off-day to allow your body to recover and build new muscle.

These exercises are only a starting point. I would strongly encourage you to seek the advice and guidance of a health professional who will work with you to develop an exercise program designed to your specific needs and goals. This is especially important if you have any health problems or suffer from any back or joint pain.

It's my sincere belief that we can take better care of our bodies by simply changing our mindset. I want you and your unborn child to be strong and safe and I wish you a full, natural and healthy life!

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