

Running in Pregnancy

I was asked to write this article for the club magazine and hope this may be of interest not just to pregnant women and women who are considering having children in the future but also run leaders, coaches or anyone who may be a friend/partner/husband to someone who may consider running through pregnancy.

More and more women wish to maintain their fit and active lifestyles when they are pregnant and there is no reason for them not to in a normal, uncomplicated pregnancy. In fact recommendations for pregnant women are inline with advice for the general population which advises 30 minutes of moderate activity daily so if a runner is use to running regularly there is no need to stop unless they want to. However the best advice is still to speak to a midwife or doctor first. Evidence shows that exercising during pregnancy can benefit the health of both the mother and baby. Furthermore there is no evidence that continuing to run increases the risk of miscarriage, premature labour or low birth weight babies.

That said it's obviously not the time to attempt to reach new PB's! It's important to listen to the body. There is a common is a conception that exercise intensity should be within certain heart rate parameters however this is unreliable in pregnancy because of the complicated changes involving the blood and circulatory system so the best guide is a 'talk test'. This is an intensity where you can continue a conversation while running so important to have a running pal along with you to check you can chat!

The 1st trimester can be challenging. It's quite likely early in the pregnancy that the woman may be suffering from tiredness and nausea so may not feel like running. The best advice is to listen to the body. But if the woman is feeling fit and well there is no reason why her running can't continue pretty much as before she became pregnant. Care should be taken in very hot conditions though as if core temperature rises too much this could potentially cause a risk to the growing baby.

During the 2nd trimester women often find they have more energy so may feel more like running but it's important not to over do it. A hormone called relaxin begins to take effect in the 2nd trimester. The job of this hormone is to relax the joints and ligaments around the pelvis to aid the body with giving birth. However it affects all ligaments so joints will be more lax making it much easier to twist an ankle for example so care should be taken particularly with off road running and stretches should not be held beyond normal range or for longer than 10 seconds. As posture changes and the bump develops balance often gets worse which again has implications for off road running. It is

probably advisable to stick to good tracks and well packed trails or paths to minimise the risk of falls.

By the 3rd trimester there will be quite a significant bump which will affect posture and running technique. It is ok to continue running as long as it is comfortable. But it is very important to listen to the body it is quite common to get tired.

I ran up to approximately 30 weeks. I gradually reduced the length of runs and added more walking breaks particularly on hills. I enjoy off road running but particular care was needed due to the risk of falls due to changes in centre of gravity as my bump grew and lax joints so I tried to stick with fairly flat well maintained trails. Over time I swapped some running for swimming and I also dipped into some antenatal exercises classes beyond 30 weeks which is nice for meeting other mums to be as well as the exercise.

Back to running

My advice would be that goals shouldn't be about getting back to reaching your Parkrun PB as quick as possible. It should be exercising to feel good, I found/find the social element of running is most important for me. Initially walking with the buggy was the best exercise gradually building up the distance and difficulty of walks. I felt able to do this after about 4/5 weeks but everybody is different.

I found however little sleep I had the fresh air and exercise helped me feel more energised and gave me a dose of feel good endorphins which helped lift my mood. It's worth remembering if you aren't getting much sleep recovery from your runs will take longer too. Over time I added to my daily walks by taking part in a postnatal class and building in some running. I waited for my six week postnatal check and the doctor said it was fine to run if I took it steady. The NHS couch to 5k is an excellent starting point. I found my fitness seemed to come back quickly however it's worth remember fitness comes back quicker than muscle and tendon strength so it's best not to push too far or fast too soon. Evening run sessions with the running club were a challenge for me due to breast feeding. Although my little boy would take a bottle from Dad if I went out. I found it a bind to have to express milk when I got home. So I often tried to arrange to meet with a friend or two at other times.

This is a rough guide as to how a running programme could be adapted through the trimesters. Over time there is a gradual reduction in the amount of running and a reduction in pace. It may be a good idea to swap a run session for some sort of cross training. Thinking in terms of time out running rather than distance is a good way to think about running rather than worrying about pace and distance.

<p>Typical week pre pregnancy</p> <p>Rest day 5mile steady run Rest day Speed session-intervals 5 miles total Rest day Parkrun Long steady run off road 7 miles</p>	<p>1st Trimester (8 weeks)</p> <p>Rest day Steady run 40 min Rest day Steady run 40 min Rest day Rest day Long steady run 1 hour</p>
<p>2nd Trimester (18 weeks)</p> <p>Rest day 40min steady run walking up hills Rest day 40 min interval jog/walk Rest day Rest day Swim</p>	<p>3rd Trimester (30 weeks)</p> <p>Rest day 30min jog/walk Rest day Antenatal exercise class Rest day Rest day Swim</p>

Further info if you wish to know more...

I have handouts and books which I am happy to lend out if anyone is interested or wants to know more.

Useful websites:

<https://www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/im-pregnant/exercise-pregnancy/what-kind-exercises-can-i-do/running-pregnancy>

NHS info on exercising during pregnancy

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/pregnancy-exercise.aspx>