



How to Train Your Pregnant Clients

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Pregnancy used to be viewed as a “condition” during which people were encouraged to rest and minimize stress to the body, due to the ungrounded idea that physical activity could potentially harm the baby. However, the overwhelming evidence now shows that, not only is prenatal exercise safe, but it is critical for the health of parent and child.

In the United States, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) is the body that provides the official medical guidelines for exercise during and after pregnancy. That latest ACOG guidelines from 2020 stated that those with uncomplicated pregnancies should be encouraged to “engage in aerobic and strength-conditioning exercise before, during, and after pregnancy,” and proposed “moderate-intensity exercise for at least 20–30 minutes per day on most or all days of the week.”

The chart on the right shows a list of “safe” activities that ACOG recommends.

These activities are a great for generalized fitness start but they do not address the highly specific nature of childbirth. At ProNatal Fitness®, we look beyond “safe and acceptable” to determine the most effective way to prepare for one of life’s most physically demanding activities.

ACOG Recommendations

Walking
Stationary cycling
Aerobic exercises
Dancing
Resistance exercises
Stretching exercises
Hydrotherapy, water aerobics

THE 4 STEPS OF A PERFORMANCE TRAINING PROGRAM

Step 1: Define the client’s goals

By establishing clearly defined goals, you can create a clear and effective program.

Step 2: Perform a needs analysis for each goal

Once you have defined goals, you must break them down to understand the unique demands of each.

Step 3: Organize programming variables

Certain training variables apply to all programs, such as intensity, volume, and rest intervals. Given the information in Steps 1 & 2, you will be able to organize these variables to achieve specific physiological adaptations for your client.

Step 4: Assess the client’s starting point

Assessing the client’s skills & capacities will lead to a more precise understanding of how to progress her through the training.

THE 3 GOALS FOR ALL PRENATAL CLIENTS

1. Pregnancy

- Minimize pain
- Maximize function

2. Childbirth

- Easier labor (parent & child)

3. Parenthood

- Quicker recovery
- Perform ADLs
- Return to activities

4 KEY PREGNANCY CHANGES

1. Hormonal Changes

Relaxin (among other hormones) relaxes the soft tissues in preparation for labor, which may lead to increased mobility and decreased stability. Be mindful of overstretching and monitor single-leg work.

2. Alignment Shifts

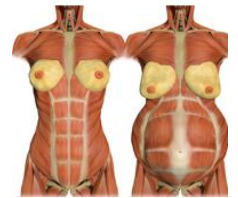
Weight gain (in belly and breasts) shifts Center of Gravity forward and up and wants to pull body into an anterior pelvic tilt. The pelvis also widens (as a result of hormonal changes).



3. Intra-Abdominal Pressure (IAP)

Chronic, excessive IAP pushes outward onto the abdominal wall and downward onto the pelvic floor. Two common issues result: Diastasis Recti (DR) and Pelvic Floor Dysfunction (PFD).

DR: A wider than “normal” separation (>2 finger-widths) of the left and right sides of rectus abdominis. A reduced ability of the linea alba (midline tissue) to produce tension. A necessary adaption in order to accommodate baby’s growth; virtually all pregnant bodies have it by 3rd trimester.



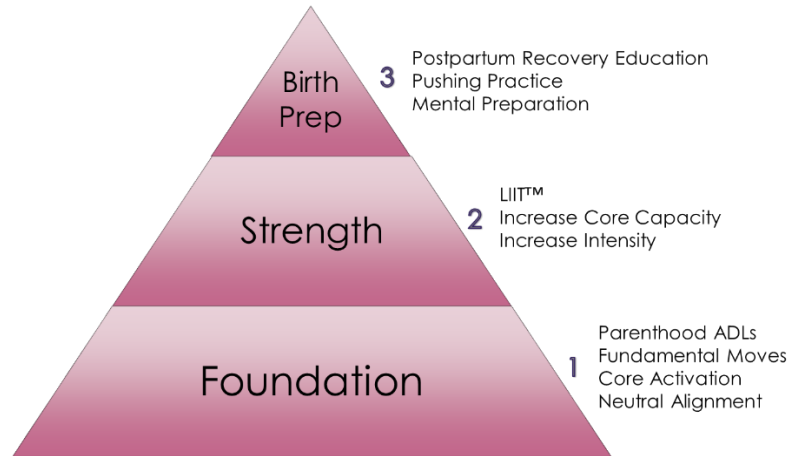
PFD: 2 main symptoms: stress incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse (POP). The former is the accidental leakage (urinary or anal) when coughing, laughing, sneezing, during impact, or quick changes of direction. The latter is the descent of one or more of the pelvic organs below their normal position in the pelvis, which often manifests as pressure or heaviness in the groin.

4. Movement

Altered gait and movement mechanics can lead to compensation and pain, making it more difficult to move through life’s daily activities. The primary reason for this is the change to one’s strength-to-weight ratio. If someone does not focus on strength as a primary objective of prenatal training, then one’s strength, relative to body weight, will decrease throughout pregnancy. This is why ProNatal Fitness® emphasizes **strength** as a main focus of all prenatal programs.



PRENATAL PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORK



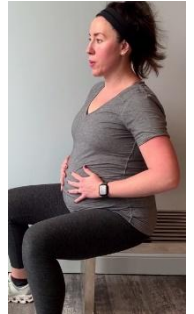
1. Foundation Stage

- Neutral Alignment
 1. Vertical Stacking: Ear-Shoulder-Hip-Knee-Ankle
 2. Neutral Pelvis: Rib cage stacked over pelvis, “flashlights forward”
- Core Activation

360° Breathing: inhale through nose into rib cage (especially sides and back, quieting belly) , exhale through pursed lips until all air is out
- Fundamental Moves

Basic human movements that include squat, lunge, carry, push, and pull
- Parenthood ADLs

Certain activities of daily living (ADLs) that will be performed repeatedly, such as hinge-patterns, carries, and level changes



2. Strength Stage

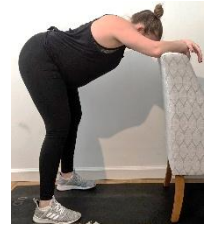
- Increase Intensity

Once a client masters fundamental moves and ADLs, the focus can shift to increasing strength with heavier loads
- Increase Core Capacity

The strength of the core is paramount and training the core to resist getting pulled out of neutral is a critical skill, which is achieved by doing anti-core work

- LIIT™

Labor Intensity Interval Training (LIIT™) is a way of preparing the mind and body for the demands of labor and focuses on periods of work and rest that mimic the durations of labor contractions



3. Birth Prep Stage

- Mental Practice

Shifting one's focus externally helps to reduce the perception of pain and Patterned 360° Breathing is a technique to focus the mind on the breath count

- Pushing Practice

Learning *how to push* is an overlooked skill and one that can be practiced prior to the Big Day

- Postpartum Recovery Education

Teaching clients basic self-care practices in the early postpartum period is a great way for them to be proactive about their healing and recovery

WHAT TO AVOID

- **2 key factors** that contribute to most prenatal injuries are *alignment shifts* and chronic, excess *Intra-Abdominal Pressure (IAP)*. Teaching your clients neutral alignment and 360° Breathing can help reduce the likelihood of developing issues, as well as manage their severity.
- **2 warning signs**, which indicate a move is too challenging for a client (at that time) and needs to be regressed, is *coning* at the midline and accidental *leakage* (urinary or anal).

Download your FREE Moves to Avoid Guide



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