

Antenatal Exercise

I. Purposes of antenatal exercise

Antenatal exercise aims at preventing low back pain and enhancing physical and psychological preparation for delivery by means of joint stretching and muscle strengthening.

II. Guidelines for antenatal exercise

- Breathe smoothly, work gradually according to your capability
- Work twice or thrice a day and repeat each set of movements ten times in every session
- Antenatal exercise may begin when pregnancy reaches 16 to 20 weeks
- Physiotherapist may make modifications to the exercise according to your physical conditions

Note: This leaflet is only a brief introduction to antenatal exercise

III. Types of antenatal exercise

(1) Pelvic floor exercise

- Sit on a chair with your back against the seatback
- Tighten the vaginal, urethral and anal muscles as if trying to withhold urination or defecation. You can also do this exercise in a standing position.

Pelvic floor exercise enhances the control and support of pelvic floor muscles. It helps you prepare for childbirth and prevents uterine prolapse, urinary incontinence and haemorrhoid.



(2) Back and abdominal exercise

- Sit on a chair with your back against the seatback
- Breathe naturally
- Tighten the abdomen and then press the pelvis downwards to flatten your low back against the seatback. Hold for 5 seconds, and relax

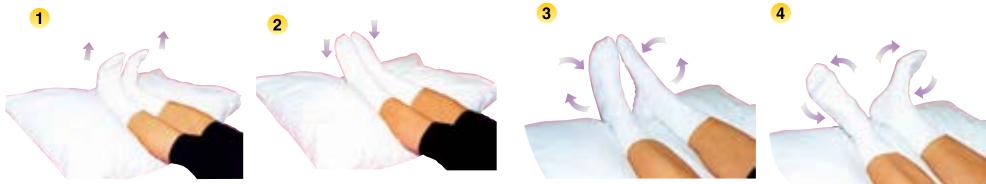
This exercise helps you by correcting the low back and pelvic posture. It strengthens your abdominal muscles and prevents back pain.

Note: Practise good posture in daily activities



(3) Ankle exercise

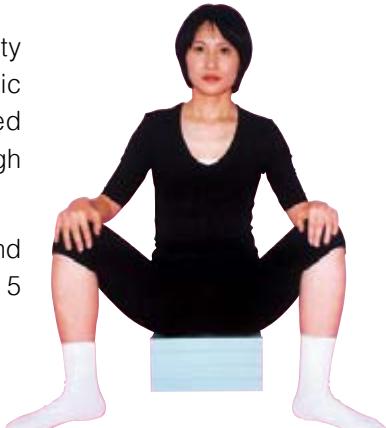
- Sit on a chair with your back against the seatback
- Start with one ankle and turn the foot upwards and downwards. Each up-and-down movement is counted as one time. Repeat ten times
- Rotate the ankle to draw an inward or outward circle. Each circular movement is counted as one time. Repeat ten times
- Repeat the same steps at the other ankle
- Ankle exercise helps reduce leg swelling and varicose vein, thus alleviating the problem of leg cramps



(4) Lower limbs relaxation exercise

- This exercise enhances the flexibility and strength of inner thighs and pelvic muscles. It helps you get accustomed to the delivery position and prevent thigh spasm during delivery
- Sit on a stable low chair against a wall and spread your thighs sideways. Hold for 5 seconds and relax

Note: 1. It is suitable for pregnant women with tight thighs
2. Do not pull apart the thighs
3. Please note that this exercise is not suitable for those with pain over the pubic bones



(5) Breathing exercise

- Breathing techniques for pain relief during labour. Exhale before inhale is suggested

A. Abdominal breathing

- Suitable for mild pain
- Breathe in through the nose and feel the abdomen expand. Then breathe out through the mouth



B. Lower costal breathing

- Suitable for medium pain
- Put your hands on the lower rib cage. Breathe in through the nose and feel your chest expand. Then breathe out lightly through the mouth



C. Apical breathing

- Suitable for severe pain
- Cross your hands below the clavicles with your mouth slightly open. Breathe in through the nose and the mouth. Breathe out lightly as if trying to flicker the flame of a candle without blowing it out, and feel the upper lungs moving slightly up and down
- * During contractions, try to relax and control your breathing
- * In between contractions, rest and relax as much as you can in the most comfortable position



Points to Note in Daily Life

- When you lift an object, bend your knees with the strength of your thigh muscles and keep your low back straight by tightening the abdominal muscle, and then straighten your knee joints to lift the object
- To get up in bed, lie down sideways with both legs hanging over the edge of the bed, and then push up your body by straightening both arms
- Tighten your abdomen and keep your back straight when sitting or standing

You are advised to join an antenatal exercise class organised by Physiotherapy Department.

(This leaflet is prepared by the Department of Health and the Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association)