

Concerns for Women

Osteoporosis is a condition of decreasing bone density as calcium is depleted, and one implication from current research is that exercise can be a factor. It appears that exercise helps to stimulate the development of bone mass. Studies have shown that weight-bearing exercises alone can help to slow down the rate of bone loss that occurs after menopause. In general, research findings have revealed that young females who have exercised early in life have greater bone densities compared to more sedentary females. Although males can, and do, develop osteoporosis it is primarily a problem for females in our culture.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is classified as an abnormal condition, not a disease, and there is evidence to indicate exercise can reduce the symptoms. Walking for general fitness should create few problems for most females. Any exercise that feels all right is most likely safe during the menstrual period.

Dysmenorrhea is painful cramps associated with menstruation. Women who are more physically fit *seem* to experience dysmenorrhea less frequently than those who are less active.

There appears to be no physical or physiological reason that a female cannot exercise during any phase of her menstrual cycle. However, exercise may cause a negative reaction under the following conditions.

1. Prior menstruation problems
2. High stress levels
3. Rapid weight loss, low body-weight, or low body-fat
4. Distance and intensity of the activity
5. Inadequate fat and protein in the diet
6. Increased body temperature during exercise

Menopause is the final cessation of menstruation. There is little evidence to suggest that exercise has any affect upon the age of onset for menopause.

Pregnancy

Women do not necessarily have to stop engaging in their exercise programs while pregnant. However, complications may dictate no activity or limited activity for some women. Whether or not they should exercise during pregnancy, and the type of exercise program to follow, may be dependent upon their fitness levels at the onset of pregnancy. For pregnant women who can and should exercise, walking is a good choice.

All females who are pregnant should be under a physician's care and follow the physician's advice for exercising.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends the following guidelines for exercise during pregnancy.

1. Do not exceed target heart rates and limits established in consultation with your physician.
2. Do not exercise *strenuously* for more than 15 minutes at a time.
3. Avoid bouncing and jarring movements. Stretch very gently.
4. Exercise on a wooden floor or a tightly carpeted surface to reduce shock and provide a sure footing.
5. After the fourth month of pregnancy do not exercise lying on your back for more than short periods of time.
6. If you experience any unusual symptoms, stop exercising and consult your physician.