

Gym moms, if your child is a future Olympic athlete, you'll always be able to say you were their first-ever gym partner.

Becoming pregnant doesn't mean you have to toss your exercise plan to the side, says Mfowethu Langeni, DO, a family medicine physician at OSF HealthCare who specializes in obstetrics. In fact, it's the opposite!

"Whatever you are doing activity-wise before pregnancy, you can keep on doing those as far as your body will let you," Dr. Langeni says. "Early on in pregnancy, you will have that added weight and body changes. But exercising is totally normal and is actually recommended, about 150 minutes per week."

As your baby sits and kicks in the womb for nine months, Dr. Langeni says core exercises and strength training like lifting weights are great ways to prioritize both mom and baby's health.

"(Labor) does take a lot of stamina, strength and core strength. But all women are different," Dr. Langeni says. "Some women push for hours during labor; some don't need to push much at all. Either way, strength conditioning and core training before and during pregnancy will help overall."

Keep on running!

Are you a marathon runner? That doesn't have to stop either.

"You can run! If you're a runner, you can run a marathon, sprints or whatever you feel that your body can comfortably do. If you're a power squatter, that's also recommended. You can lift weights, take walks or do none of it," Dr. Langeni says. "Studies have shown that you get more bang for your buck during cardio when it's at a higher intensity. Everyone's built differently, so cater to what you can and can't do, and what your body can tolerate."

The best starting point, Dr. Langeni says, is having a conversation with your OB/GYN. Tell them about your exercise goals, and make sure everything is safe for mom and baby. The main thing to avoid, Dr. Langeni says, is any exercise that would inflict trauma to the stomach.

Full body workouts are great if you're pregnant or not, Dr. Langeni adds. "Doing core strength helps boost your metabolism and immunity and helps to regain your strength. It also helps with your cardiovascular system."

Prioritize hydration

While hydration is always necessary, it becomes even more important during pregnancy. Good hydration helps provide a healthy blood supply to mom and baby.

"When you're pregnant, the body starts to change physically and physiologically. Women's blood volume increases by about 50% during pregnancy, so it's very important to stay hydrated," Dr. Langeni says.

It can even help keep moms out of the hospital in the first trimester or early second trimester.

Drop the cigarettes and alcohol

"Cigarette smoking also has some (negative) implications to the baby. People who smoke cigarettes have a higher chance of having complications in pregnancy," Dr. Langeni says. "You increase your risk of preterm labor, smaller baby in size and increase your risk of maternal issues like high blood pressure."

Drinking alcohol can also harm the fetus. “Zero alcohol is better,” he emphasizes. The baby can develop something called fetal alcohol syndrome, which comes from chronic alcohol use if the mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy.

Electrolyte drinks and pregnancy

While Dr. Langeni is a proponent of electrolyte drinks in general, he urges caution for pregnant moms to drink them, reminding everyone to keep a close eye on the labels. Different electrolyte drinks will have high amounts of sugar, but he recommends sugar free electrolyte substitutions like sugar free Gatorade and Pedialyte.

Dr. Langeni says moms will naturally gain weight in pregnancy. It’s totally normal! He even says your caloric intake should increase around 300 calories per day to keep mom and baby healthy.

Staying away from processed lunch meats, unpasteurized meats and drinks or seafoods that contain mercury is also a must.