



# Active Movement in Water During Pregnancy



[www.swimmingnz.org.nz](http://www.swimmingnz.org.nz)

Activity during pregnancy has many benefits both for Mum and baby



- ✓ Having fun
- ✓ Feeling weightless
- ✓ Spending time with friends
- ✓ Feeling relaxed
- ✓ Health benefits for you and baby
- ✓ Did I mention FUN?...

## What is Active Movement in Water?

Active Movement in Water, uses water as a medium or environment in which to explore the fundamental principles and philosophies of *Active Movement* (a SPARC initiative launched in 2004). Active Movement in Water is an initiative with support and resources to encourage pregnant women, and parents of young children to be active, and encourage their young children to be physically active.

Research indicates that there is a window of opportunity to learn fundamental movement skills under 5 years of age which in turn enhance the likelihood of life long activity and the associated health benefits. Children are more likely to be active if their parents are. In addition the potential for enhanced brain development and learning as a result of positive physical activity in early childhood is integral to the *Active Movement* philosophy.

## When does Active Movement in Water begin?

Active Movement in Water begins when your baby is conceived. It is important to continue or begin activity patterns during pregnancy and it is just as important for newborns as it is for older children. Your activity will directly affect your baby both during pregnancy and after the birth of your baby.

## Active Movement in Water Develops:

- A life long interest in being physically active
- An understanding of the body and how to move in the water.
- Bones and muscles
- Confidence and self esteem
- Memory
- The eyes
- A willingness to try challenging activities
- The ability to work with others
- Speech and language

- The brain
- Fundamental movement and aquatic skills

## Why do I need to be an active pregnant woman?

Studies have shown that the benefits can include:

- Reduced labour time
- Reduced recovery time post partum
- Assist with weight management post partum
- And a healthier feeling pregnancy

## Make sure you are ready to exercise:

When you are pregnant and considering exercising always check with your doctor first. If you have any of the following conditions you may need to take special care.

- Heart Problems
- Asthma or Chronic Lung Problems
- High Blood Pressure
- Extreme weight problems (Under or Over)
- Muscle or Joint Problems
- History of premature labour
- History of several miscarriages
- Multiple Pregnancy
- History of Incompetent Cervix
- Persistent Bleeding
- Placental Problems (Previa, etc.)

## What is your current level of fitness?

One of the things that you need to determine before you get started is where you are fitness wise.

If you have previously been a couch potato this is not the time to take up most sports. If you have been very active before and are participating in an activity that is safe for pregnancy or can be modified for pregnancy, generally you can continue to participate. However, most women are not able to maintain the same pace that they did before the pregnancy, so keep that in mind.

There are several exercises that you can do while pregnant, even if you were previously sedentary. These would generally be: walking, swimming, and specialized pregnancy aerobics. The key, as with any exercise in pregnancy, is to take it relatively easy and to **listen to your body**.

## Planning to get active:

Exercise is of benefit to everyone- Pregnant Women are no exception. So, now that you've decided to exercise what comes next? First of all you want to exercise on a regular basis. This is what will give you the most benefit. When you exercise you need to make sure that you warm up and cool down, have plenty of water available, and are cleared by your care provider.

Spending time in the water can be very enjoyable while you are pregnant; your joints are given a rest as the water takes some of the 'weight' of your growing baby. Exercising within your normal scope is also generally recommended during

pregnancy, eating well and keeping mobile can help with the birthing process, as well as aid recovery from the birth.

Whether you consider yourself a 'water baby' or not, spending time in the water while you are pregnant and developing a relaxed relationship with water will help you to be relaxed with your baby around the water once you meet him, or her!

## What to wear at the pool?

You can purchase purpose-made swim suits (with expanding tummies), however, you may find, sports briefs and a sports Bra are more versatile as there is no material to stretch over your bump. If you'd prefer to be more 'covered-up' try the sports bra and briefs with a rash vest which you can use after baby arrives for covering up in the sun. The material is very stretchy and will grow with you and baby! Bike shorts may be added for the more modest. If you are large breasted, consider wearing a maternity/nursing bra under a sports bra for added support. Whatever you wear, the pool management will require it to be clean and not too long or baggy which may restrict your movement.



## Getting in and out of the pool while pregnant

If visiting a public pool, take care with your entry and exit to protect baby.

Entry options:



### Ladder:

Hold the ladder and walk down backwards, watching your feet as you go. Your balance will be affected now you are pregnant so go steady on your first visit. The pool sides and the pool floor (once you are in) will be slippery.

### Ramp entry:

If walking down a ramp hold onto the hand rail and take careful steps so as not to slip.

### Getting out:

As you get out of the pool move slowly. You will have been benefiting from the freedom of weightlessness while in the water and your joints and blood pressure need to adjust as you get out. Climb the ladders slowly or if walking up a ramp hold the hand rail and take your time!

## What should I do in the pool?

### Walking / Jogging

In pools which are 1.2- 1.4m deep most adults can walk and still have the baby bump submerged and benefit from the support of the water. If the water is too shallow you will still be carrying the weight of baby as well as dealing with the resistance of the water. Start slowly at first, then you might try larger steps and lifting your knees higher (and slightly out to the side so as not to 'squash' your baby bump)

The following exercises taken from "Water Fitness During Your Pregnancy" by Jane Katz)

We had a group of mums-to-be try these they all felt that with an aqua-jogging belt they felt less conspicuous and found them to be fun and challenging. Aqua-jogging belts are available at most pools at no charge simply wrap it around your back and clip at the front. Then you are free to walk jog and do circuit type exercises as described below in your own time. Some pools also have structured classes if you prefer, ask at the pool reception for details.

#### Benefits:

Helps your body adjust to the water and water resistance

#### How to do it:

- In chest depth water or in deep water wearing an aqua-jogging belt.
- Walk through the water moving your arms forward and back
- Breathe normally
- You can travel forward, backwards diagonally or sideways and increase your stride length and tempo as you warm up.
- If you feel energetic move to a jog then return to walking

### Shoulder Shrug

#### Benefits:

Loosens and relieves tension in your shoulders.

#### How to do it:

- Stand in chest depth water or in deep water wearing an aqua-jogging belt.
- Arms relaxed at your sides.
- Lift both shoulders up towards your ears.
- Roll them alternately forward and back.
- Try rolling one shoulder at a time

### Pendulum Body Swings

#### Benefits:

Tones and stretches the muscles of your entire body especially your sides which are often overlooked.

#### How to do it:

- Standing in neck deep water or in deep water wearing an aqua-jogging belt .
- Holding the side or with a kick board in each hand.
- Pull with one arm and push with the other to swing your legs sideways and upwards towards one arm.
- Return to a vertical position and repeat on the other side.
- Inhale through your nose as you lift your legs and exhale as you lower them.
- If swinging both legs is too difficult try one leg at a time.

## Wall Knee Lift

### Benefits:

Strengthens abdominal and buttock muscles, increases hip flexibility and relaxes lower back muscles.

### How to do it:

- Standing tall in chest depth water or in deep water wearing an aqua-jogging belt.
- Arms out stretched.
- Tilt your pelvis forward and backwards several times
- Lift one knee up waist level, swing your knee towards the opposite shoulder, back to the front and out to the other side away from your mid line. Then
- back to the centre and slowly return to the starting position
- Repeat on the other side.
- Breathe slowly and regularly with every repeat.

**TIP:** While turning your knee out to the side do not lift your hips in the direction of the turn.

## Water Kegel

### Benefits:

Isolates and strengthens the perineal and pelvic floor muscles giving better support to your reproductive organs, and improving your control during delivery. The Kegel exercise develops improved circulation in the perineum, aiding the healing process after birth and helping to relieve discomfort during your recovery. If done regularly the Kegel exercise can help prevent urinary incontinence both during and after your pregnancy Kegels should be included in every workout.

### How to do this:

- Standing tall in chest depth water or in deep water wearing an aqua-jogging belt.
- Tighten your lower abdominal muscles then contract your pelvic floor and vaginal muscles. After ten repetitions hold the contraction and your breath for ten seconds then release and exhale.
- You can repeat this sequence several times during your workout.

## Double Leg Circles

### Benefits:

Strengthening your abdominal muscles and stretching inner thigh muscles.

### How to do this:

- Your back against the corner of the poolside with legs together grasp both pool edges.
- Support yourself with your arms and bring your feet into as close to an 'L' pike as you can manage.
- Bring your legs together and swing them



- alternately in each direction
- Draw circles with your legs together then reverse the direction.
- Bring your legs down slowly and start again.
- If this exercise creates ANY strain in your lower back, lower your legs and try one leg at a time.
- Try leg circles you're your feet flexed as a variation.

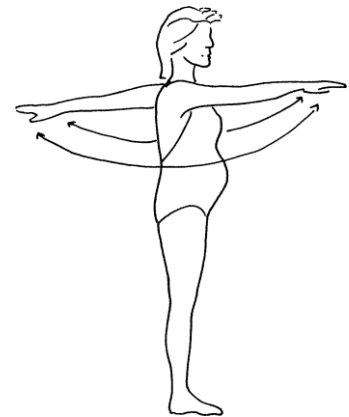
## Arm Press

### Benefits:

Tones and strengthens upper-body muscles, promotes upper body flexibility and helps you to identify and control upper body tension.

### How to do this:

- Standing in shoulder depth water or in deep water while wearing an aqua-jogging belt.
- Extend one arm in front at the surface and the other behind you with palms facing down.
- Press both arms down towards your thighs and then up towards the surface so you finish with the opposite arm in front.
- Turn your palms so they face down again and repeat.
- Breathe naturally and keep your posture tall.



## Deep Water Jog

### Benefits:

Allows you to practice running, coordination for overall conditioning without impact and or risk of injury.

### How to do this:

- Wearing an aqua-jogging belt or buoyancy vest in deep water.
- Take a vertical position with tall posture.
- Simulate a jogging action (be sure your arms and legs will not contact with pool walls equipment or other 'joggers' as you go.)
- Be sure to move your arms in opposition to your legs.
- Maintain vertical posture and breathe normally.

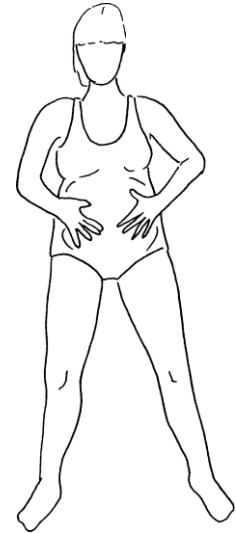
## Effleurage

### Benefits:

Helps you to relax during labour and delivery by diverting your mind somewhat from the pain of internal contractions. This prepared childbirth technique is usually combined with a breathing exercise.

### How to do this:

- Standing in the pool at a comfortable water depth or in deep water wearing an aqua-jogging belt.
- Place your fingers on your navel pointed slightly downwards.
- Trace a circular design on your abdomen with your fingertips in a continuous motion for approximately one minute.
- You can use effleurage between exercises with different breathing patterns.



## Leg Swirl

### Benefits:

Strengthens and tones lower abdominals and leg muscles.

### How to do this:

- In chest depth water, stand perpendicular to the pool wall holding the side or rail.
- Lift your outside leg in front of you as high as you comfortably can.
- Slowly swing your leg around in a circular path until your leg is extended behind you.
- Breathe regularly.
- Slowly swing your leg back to the front and lower it.
- Turn around and repeat using the other leg.
- Be sure to swing your leg from the hip socket, try not to raise your hip from their normal position and maintain tall posture throughout.

## Hip Touch

### Benefits:

Stretches and tones the abdominal muscles

### How to do this:

- Standing in waist deep water almost one arm width from the wall.
- Keeping your feet together grasp the pool edge with your inside arm
- Try to touch your hip to the wall keeping your outside arm at water level.
- Swing your hip as far away from the pool wall as you can.
- Repeat on the other side.



- For a greater stretch when you swing your hips away from the wall raise your outside arm in a circular motion above your head towards the wall.

## Pelvic Tilt

### Benefits:

Helps body alignment, relieves strain on back muscles, and strengthens abdominal muscles.

### How to do this:

- Stand in waist deep water with your back and hips against the wall. Rest your arms on the pool wall or ledge for support.
- Tilt your pelvis upward by pressing the small of your back towards the wall.
- Hold for a moment then relax back to the starting position and breathe normally.



### Aqua jogging

This is usually done in deep water with a buoyant belt around the waist, you may need to secure your belt around your back and under your arms. A 'noodle' will serve a similar purpose.

### Floating

Floating is widely recognised as relaxing, helping to reduce stress and increase positive endorphins in the body.



Floating allows you to recognise any muscles you are holding tight subconsciously.



Hang in the water on your front letting the water support you and imagine you are 'letting go' of each muscle in your body... start with your hands, then fore arms working right through your body to your toes.

## **Aqua-Aerobics**

Gentle aqua aerobics classes can be enjoyable, keep you fit and mobile and set up life long activity patters for you which will be role modelled to your children

It is well documented that if children are active under 5 years they are more likely to pursue healthy activity levels throughout life and will in turn be less susceptible to diabetes, obesity and heart disease.

## **Swimming**

Swimming while pregnant is just as enjoyable, you will float in a different way and may feel like you lose your balance as you stroke. Stay relaxed and enjoy the weightless feeling.

### **Know your limits**

Now that you're committed to regular exercise, what are your limitations during pregnancy? Again, you should discuss this with your practitioner, they can give you information specific to your pregnancy. You should strive for the following:

#### **Take care of your balance:**

After the fourth month your center of gravity and buoyancy change and you can quickly find yourself off balance. Although your baby is very well protected by the amniotic sac should a fall occur, the best protection is prevention! Take special care getting into and out of the pool the pool floor may be slippery and combined with your new centre of buoyancy this can sweep you off your feet. As you exit, use a ladder and hold on tightly or walk up the ramp and hold the hand rail. The water supports your newly increasing weight, and as you exit it can feel like gravity is being very unfair, you may also feel a little light headed as the water pressure on your body is released and blood flow to your brain is reduced.

#### **No bouncing or jerking:**

Bouncing exercises are not great for your joints or bones at any point, but especially during pregnancy. Your body produces a hormone called relaxin that actually softens the ligaments allowing your bones to spread for the birth of your baby. This is a great thing, although it does predispose you for a higher risk of injury when doing bouncing or jerking motions. Be careful walking in shallow water (below your belly button) as your weight is not being supported but the water resistance is high if you are moving about.

#### **Don't overdo it:**

This includes overheating. Raising your core temperature too much can affect the baby adversely. Always drink water before, during and after exercising. Listening to your body when something hurts or doesn't feel right, that means stop!

#### **Stop Signs:**

- Dizziness
- Faintness
- Headaches

- Shortness of Breath
- Uterine contractions
- Vaginal Bleeding or fluid leaking
- Heart Palpitations

## Heart rates:

Generally women should keep their heart rate under 140 beats per minute. However, for some women this may be too high. So, the easiest way to do this is what is called the talk test. Simply put, if you are too winded while exercising to carry on a conversation, you are doing too much.

## When can I start back after my birth?

Generally this will be about four to six weeks postpartum for a vaginal birth and six to eight weeks for a surgical birth. Again, talk to your practitioner about returning to exercise. There are also special exercises, like kegeling pelvic floor exercises, that can be started immediately after the birth.

Exercise should make you feel better during pregnancy (and life!). Being in the water should be relaxing, stimulating and enjoyable.

## What if I am fearful of water?

If you are afraid in the water, you should approach a swimming instructor for confidence lessons. Your fear of water will easily be transferred to your new baby so now is a good time to be motivated to face this challenge. A swimming teacher will take you through some breathing exercises, teach you relaxed floating and submerging activities at your own pace so you won't feel rushed or threatened. Go to a class with a friend learning to be confident in the water will change your life and your baby's!

## Helpful websites

Active movement resources and extra information for you and your baby can be found at:

<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/en-nz/young-people/Ages-0-5-Years/Active-Movement-Resources1/>

<http://www.swimmingnz.org.nz/education/active-movement-aquatics-for-early-childhood>