

Modifying Core Exercises for Pregnant Women



Up to a point, core exercises can still be performed by your clients who are pregnant as long as your client feels safe and comfortable while doing them. Exercises like planks, side planks, and Pallof presses are likely fine up until the beginning of the third trimester as long you modify it as needed as the client's abdomen grows.

Consider the changes that are occurring to the length of the abdominal muscles as the baby grows and how this impacts on the amount of force the muscles can generate — most women will find that their abdominal exercises need to be regressed significantly as the pregnancy progresses.

Modifying Core Exercises

Core exercises will likely need to be modified starting around the middle of the second trimester (though it could also be sooner or later) to help accommodate your client's growing abdomen.

For example, depending on how she's feeling, planks could be completed on an incline to help reduce the overall load on her abdominal muscles and back, or she could drop both knees and hold a plank in a more supported position.

As the pregnancy progresses, some of the more common exercises that we note become challenging during the later stages of pregnancy include planks, pull-ups, V-ups and crunches. However, as always, this is dependent on that individual.

The other concern with activities like crunches in this period is that the supine position may put pressure on a major blood vessel, which can lead to dizziness and nausea. Instead, she could perform standing crunches,



Pallof presses, or straight-arm pull-backs with a band in place of these types of movements. The goal of core modifications here is to prevent an overload of pressure on the abdomen, prevent symptoms, and strengthen the muscles of the trunk while maintaining proper form.

What to Watch Out For

You'll want to watch for those exercises that both place excessive pressure on the linea alba and cause doming of the abdomen. And of course, if your client is experiencing pain or any pelvic floor symptoms that don't resolve with a modification, she should not continue with the exercise.

The easiest way to avoid this in a bootcamp class is to provide alternate movement examples to the class (you don't need to call her out as the reason why, but could instead demonstrate two possible movements) so that she can self-adjust if she becomes symptomatic.

The following chart demonstrates exercises, sample symptoms that necessitate a modification, and possible regressions that are likely appropriate depending on your client's trimester.

Each client is unique, so while this chart can provide guidance, make sure you coach the woman in front of you based on her individual needs.



Category of Core Exercise	Possible Symptom(s)	First Trimester Alternative	Second Trimester Alternative	Third Trimester Alternative
ANTI-EXTENSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low back pain • Bulging in linea alba 	Dead bug	Front plank	Incline front plank
ANTI-ROTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulging in linea alba • Low back pain 	Shoulder tap	Tall-kneeling Pallof press	Standing Pallof press
ANTI-LATERAL FLEXION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulging in linea alba • Neck or shoulder pain 	Side plank	Dumbbell rack carry	Suitcase carry
HIP FLEXION WITH NEUTRAL SPINE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pelvic girdle pain • Bulging in linea alba • Wrist pain 	Bear crawl	Slow mountain climber	Incline slow mountain climber
ROTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulging in linea alba • Neck or shoulder pain 	Half-kneeling band lift	Tall-kneeling band chop	Standing band rotation

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We've provided trimester-specific exercises within each category, but while these regressions are *likely* they are not *definite*, and will vary client by client. You can find more information on adaptations to be made during each trimester [here](#).



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