

Modifying Cardio Exercises for Pregnant Women



Cardio exercises are exercises that increase our breathing rate, raise our heart rates, and challenge our cardiovascular systems. While some people link cardio with aerobic activity, aerobic activity is really only one form of cardio. So wall balls, medicine ball slams, kettlebell swings, running, rope slams, jogging, swimming, bootcamp classes... you get it — they all qualify.

There are tons of potential benefits to doing cardio during pregnancy, including improved mood and sleep, possible reduction in hip and back pain, and decreased stress.

There are still a couple of possible risks, though. Cardio exercises that could result in a fall, like skiing, should be avoided during pregnancy so as not to endanger mother or child.

Additionally, many cardio exercises are high impact, and you already learned that this can cause some potential health issues, such as pelvic floor dysfunction.

Modifying Cardio Exercises

The main way to modify a cardio exercise for a client who is pregnant is to reduce the intensity or the load. If she's in her first trimester and running, but running is causing pain or incontinence, reduce the distance or slow her down to a walk.

If she's taking your bootcamp class and is struggling to keep the pace, have her slow down, work toward fewer reps, or modify the exercise to make it a bit easier. Encourage plenty of water breaks so that she stays hydrated and doesn't overheat, as well.



The general rule here is to modify the exercise if she can't carry on a conversation (or a few sentences of one, at least) without gasping for air.

What to Watch Out For

Just as with our other exercises, if you notice that your client is struggling, losing form, or excessively out of breath — and modifying the exercise doesn't relieve this right away — it's time to stop.

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.



Cardio Exercise	Possible Symptom(s)	First Trimester Alternative	Second Trimester Alternative	Third Trimester Alternative
RUNNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overexertion • Dehydration • Pelvic floor symptoms • Low back pain • Pelvic pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce pace • Reduce distance • Increase water intake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce pace or distance • Sub jogging for running • Alternate walking and jogging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentle jogging • Fast walking • Walking • Light sled pushing or dragging
ROWING MACHINE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back pain • Bulging in linea alba • Overexertion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce pace • Reduce overall time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce pace and overall time • Sub indoor cycling 	Indoor cycling
JUMPING JACKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaking urine • Pelvic girdle pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce pace • Reduce reps 	Stepping jack squats	Low-impact (non) jumping jacks
JUMPING ROPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pelvic floor symptoms • Low back pain • Pelvic pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce pace • Reduce reps • Increase rest • Try a different breathing strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce pace • Reduce reps • Increase rest • Try a different breathing strategy • Bodyweight squat • Step-ups • Light sled push or drag 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bodyweight squat • Step-ups • Light sled push or drag



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