

Modifying Strength Training Exercises for Pregnant Women



There are hundreds of strength training exercises that are appropriate during pregnancy, so if your client is cleared for exercise, she may reap lots of benefits from the strength training components of a bootcamp.

For example, your client can do variations of squats, hinge movements, bridges, rows, pulldowns, and presses. You don't need to feel like your options are limited — though there are a few we *do* recommend avoiding.

Modifying Strength Training Exercises

When selecting whether or not to modify strength training exercises for your pregnant client, first consider what *not* to do. There are two things that you should avoid having her do from the start:

- **Olympic Lifting:** Olympic lifts (such as the barbell snatch and the barbell clean and jerk) and any other lift that requires the bar to move explosively past the midsection should be avoided. While *possibly* still OK in the first trimester for someone who had already been training with these movements, they may pose a risk of fetal trauma from impact as the pregnancy progresses and the woman's midsection grows.
- **Valsalva Maneuver:** The Valsalva maneuver (the act of attempting to exhale with the nostrils and mouth [or the glottis] closed as a way to increase intra-abdominal pressure and intra-thoracic pressure, which can create more trunk stiffness and more stability when attempting to lift something heavy) may not only affect blood pressure, it may also direct more pressure downward into the pelvic floor. For that reason, the consensus among our pre- and postnatal experts at GGS is that pregnant women avoid the Valsalva maneuver and breath holding altogether.



For other types of resistance exercises, modifications will be dependent on the particular client you are working with and how she is feeling. If she starts experiencing symptoms, make a modification as appropriate.

For example, if your client is doing deep goblet squats with a kettlebell and feels some mild pressure in her perineum, reduce the depth of her squat, give her a lighter kettlebell, or change her technique to see if that reduces or eliminates her symptoms.

If it doesn't, try having her move to the next regression instead. If the regression doesn't relieve her symptoms, then it's time to stop.

What to Watch Out For

The strength training exercises that you need to keep an eye out for are those that:

- Cause pain or altered technique to avoid discomfort.
- Cause the abdominal wall to bulge along the midline, whether this is something that you notice or something she points out. (For more information on diastasis recti, check out [this article](#).)
- Keep her in the supine position for a prolonged period of time in later stages of pregnancy or at any point when the position begins causing dizziness, nausea, tingling or numbness, or other symptoms.
- Require a heavy load that may lead to overexertion, poor form, or breath holding.
- May present injury to the abdomen (e.g., snatch, clean).
- Exercises performed at such a high intensity that she can't speak comfortably.



If you are noticing any of these issues, or your client reports them to you, you can try cueing her on things that she may need to pay more attention to (e.g., breath holding).

If that doesn't work, modify her exercise to try and relieve her symptoms via an adjustment. Keep modifying until she is comfortable or decides to take a break, or the class moves to the next exercise.

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.



Strength Training Exercise	Possible Symptom(s)	First Trimester Alternative	Second Trimester Alternative	Third Trimester Alternative
GLUTE BRIDGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dizziness (in second trimester) Pelvic girdle pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate her head 15 degrees or perform on incline (e.g., with head and shoulders on a Bosu ball) Bodyweight hip thrust Hip thrust march 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate her head 15 degrees or perform on incline (e.g., with head and shoulders on a Bosu ball) Bodyweight hip thrust Hip thrust march 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate her head 15 degrees or perform on incline (e.g., with head and shoulders on a Bosu ball) Bodyweight hip thrust Hip thrust march Tall kneeling hover
PLANK	Bulging in linea alba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce time spent in plank Change her breathing strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce time spent in plank Change her breathing strategy Incline plank Plank on hands instead of elbows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incline plank Plank on knees
BENT-OVER ROWS	Low back pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce weight Reduce number of reps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hand- and knee-supported bent-over row Standing band or cable row 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standing band or cable row Seated cable row
PUSH-UPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrist pain Low back pain Bulging in linea alba 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incline push-ups Band-supported push-ups Push-ups on knees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incline push-ups Band-supported push-ups Split-stance band press (one-arm or bilateral) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incline push-ups Band-supported push-ups Split-stance band press (one-arm or bilateral)
SUMO SQUATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaking urine Heaviness in the perineum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce depth Bodyweight sumo squats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce depth Adopt a narrower stance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce depth Adopt a narrower stance



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](#).



If you want to get the *exact* skills and knowledge you need to confidently & effectively train women at every stage of pregnancy, consider becoming a Certified Pre- and Postnatal Coaching Specialist. To learn more, visit: girlsgonestrong.com/cppc