

Fit ball exercises for pregnancy

Fit/gym/swiss balls (they have many names!) are great to exercise with during pregnancy as they work your core without you having to do 'sit-up' type exercises. This is because anything you do on the ball is going to require you to balance and stabilise yourself using your deep abdominal muscles (or TVA - Transversus abdominis). It is important to keep your core strong to support your back and pelvic floor muscles during pregnancy and to get these muscles strong for labour (and a quick recovery post-baby!) You can do a huge variety of exercises with a gym ball (especially if you also have a set of dumbbells) to work your whole body.

If you are not using it for exercise you can still get loads of use out of your ball during pregnancy and can work your abs without even trying! Sit up straight on it to watch TV or at your computer, do some little bounces (great for encouraging baby later on), circle your hips on the ball in both directions or move them in a figure of eight. Also, try leaning over the ball for a nice back stretch; you can add a side to side or forward and back motion to this stretch too. Incidentally all these moves are also excellent to use during labour! Here is a workout that is suitable for any stage of pregnancy (assuming you are ok to exercise). All you need is your ball and ideally a couple of sets of dumbbells (1kg and 3kg); although tins or bottles are a good replacement!

If you like this please check out my web site: www.bump2mumfitness.com and my book *The 3-Plan: Your Complete Pregnancy and Postnatal Exercise Plan (on Amazon)*, which has over 75 exercises for pregnancy and the postnatal period.

Pregnancy gym ball workout

(30-40 minutes, 12 exercises to work your whole body)

Remember to warm up and cool down and always listen to your body and stop if anything doesn't feel right. There are three exercises for each body area (arms and upper body / legs and bum / abs and back) plus one 'extra' for if you are feeling extra motivated or want to substitute one of the other moves.

Section 1: Legs and bum

1. Wall squat (hold a weight in each hand - optional)

A great exercise to work your legs. To work harder don't completely straighten your legs between reps; keep them slightly bent staying in the muscle.

- Start with your feet hip width apart and your ball between your mid to lower back and the wall.

- Keep your hands on your hips or by your sides if you are holding weights. Keep your shoulders back and tummy muscles pulled in throughout.
- Slowly squat down, bending your knees and rolling the ball down the wall until your knees are bent at approx. 90 degrees.
- Now slowly return to the starting position. Have a chair nearby for support in case you get stuck in your squat!

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

2. One leg lunge (hold a weight in each hand - optional)

You could easily add a bicep/hammer curl to the upward press to bring in an upper body component.

- Start by taking a big step forward with one foot. The back foot should be resting on top of your gym ball, shin down.
- Keep your hands on your hips or by your sides if you are holding weights. Keep your shoulders back and tummy muscles pulled in throughout.
- Slowly bend your front knee until it reaches approx. 90 degrees.
- Now slowly return to the starting position. Again, have a chair/wall nearby for support in case you get stuck or find it difficult to balance without.

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

3. Ballet squat

Steer clear of this one if you have any problems with your pelvis during pregnancy and keep your legs a bit narrower if it's not comfortable.

- Start with your feet double hip width apart and toes pointed outwards, holding your ball out in front of you with nearly straight arms.
- Keep your shoulders back and tummy muscles pulled in throughout.
- Slowly bend your knees, without pushing your bottom backwards. Hold the ball directly out in front of you and do not rest your arms until the end of the set.
- Now slowly return to the starting position.

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

4 - Extra: Squat and shoulder push

Remember squats are great as they work all the big muscles in your legs. This exercise brings in your upper body too!

- Start with your feet hip width apart, holding your ball out in front of you with nearly straight arms.

- Keep your shoulders back and tummy muscles pulled in throughout.
- Slowly squat down, bending your knees and sticking your bottom back as if you were going to sit on a chair, until your knees are bent at approx. 90 degrees.
- As you squat lower the ball to touch the floor.
- Now slowly return to the starting position and as you do push your ball up above your head. Go directly into your next squat.

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

Section 2: Arms and upper body

5. Arm work out on the ball (2 x 3kg weights)

Work your core, biceps, triceps and shoulders!

- Sit upright on the ball with your feet flat on the floor about hip-width apart. Keep your shoulders back and tummy muscles pulled in throughout.
- In this position do:
 - 12-15 bicep curls
 - 12-15 tricep kick backs (arms close to your body at 90 degrees and straighten out behind you)
 - 12-15 overhead presses

6. Arm and leg lift (2 x 3kg weights)

Work your core, shoulders and the front of your legs. You'll need your brain in gear to coordinate too!

- Sit upright on the ball with your feet flat on the floor about hip-width apart. Keep your shoulders back and tummy muscles pulled in throughout.
- In this position slowly lift one leg off the floor, keeping it straight.
- As you lift the leg, lift the opposite arm out to the side in a straight arm side raise, lifting it no higher than shoulder height.
- Return both the leg and arm to the starting position and repeat with the other arm/leg.

Repeat 15-20 times (alternate sides) and do two sets.

7. Wall push up

This great exercise works your arms and chest. Less intense than a regular push up and saves getting up and down from the floor!

- Stand upright facing a wall roughly a metre away. Keep your shoulders back and tummy muscles pulled in throughout.

- Hold the ball against the wall in front of your chest and have your hands flat on the ball in front of your shoulders.
- To do the push up bend your arms and lower your chest to the ball, keeping your body straight and rolling your heels off the floor.
- Hold briefly at your lowest point then return to the starting position.

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

8 - Extra: Seated overhead tricep press (1 x 3kg weight)

Work those bingo wings mamma!

- Sit upright on the ball with your feet flat on the floor about hip-width apart. Keep your shoulders back and tummy muscles pulled in throughout.
- In this position hold a dumbbell in both hands (one hand on each end) and stretch your arms straight above your head.
- Keeping everything else still and your elbows close to the sides of your head, drop the weight behind your head. Be careful your elbows don't drift outwards and focus on your triceps.
- Return your arms to the starting position.

Repeat 15-20 times (alternate sides) and do two sets

Section 3: Abs and back

9. Seated upper back squeeze and ab-hold (2 x 1kg weights)

Try adding 10 normal ab squeezes at the end to make sure you have really worked your deep core muscles.

- Sit upright on the ball, with your shoulders back and feet flat on the floor.
- Breathe in deeply and let your chest expand. Then, as you exhale, draw your belly button in so that you feel like you are wearing a tight corset (engaging your TVA). The rest of your body should be still. Hold this position, making sure you can breathe comfortably. Hold a light weight in each hand, with your arms out in front of you at head height. Keep your shoulders back.
- Slowly bring your arms in towards you, so that your shoulder blades are squeezing together and the weights come to either side of your chest.
- Slowly return your arms to the starting position. Once you have completed your back squeeze repetitions release your abs.

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

10. Seated pelvic tilt

Work your deep tummy muscles and keep your pelvis mobilised. Don't be afraid of sucking your tummy in, baby won't feel it!

- Sit upright on the ball, with your shoulders back and feet flat on the floor.
- Breathe in deeply and let your chest expand. Then, as you exhale, draw your belly button in so that you feel like you are wearing a tight corset (engaging your TVA).
- Without moving your feet, tilt your pelvis forward and upward.
- Hold for a couple seconds and return to start position. To mix it up you can also try side to side and figure of eight movements.

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

11. Small bridge

In addition to working your core you need to keep your lower back strong in pregnancy. This will hit your bottom as well - fantastic!

- Lie back with your head and shoulders on your ball and feet flat on the floor about hip-width apart.
- Breathe in deeply and let your chest expand. Then, as you exhale, draw your belly button in so that you feel like you are wearing a tight corset (engaging your TVA).
- Using a small movement, lift your pelvis upward so that your body is in a straight line.
- Hold for a couple seconds and return to start position.

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

12 - Extra: Roll out

Only take this move as far as is comfortable for you and keep it slow and controlled. Avoid this if you have any problems with your blood pressure.

- Kneel on the floor with your arms out straight in front of you and resting on the top of the ball and your back straight. Your ball should be arms-length away.
- Breathe in deeply and let your chest expand. Then, as you exhale, draw your belly button in so that you feel like you are wearing a tight corset (engaging your TVA).
- Slowly roll on top of the ball until your forearms are resting on top of it (like a half plank)
- Hold for a couple seconds and return to start position.

Repeat 15-20 times and do two sets.

Enjoy!

Lucie x