

Running a Marathon at Eight Months Pregnant

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Wondering how pregnancy will affect your exercise regiment? Tara Zimliki, founder of **Tara's Boot Camp** and a mother of two who ran the New York Marathon while eight months pregnant, explains how you can safely exercise for two.



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Q: You ran the New York Marathon at eight months pregnant. Can you tell me about that experience?

A: It was a tremendous experience. I paced myself with every mile and I truly didn't worry about my finishing time. It was a great experience, and I was fortunate to have much support from my physician, friends and family. Also, it prepared me for what occurred less than six weeks later - the natural delivery of my daughter, Ella. I would not have had the strength and endurance for labour had I not been so strong.

Q: Is running that long with a big baby in your stomach really difficult?

A: It probably felt similar to someone who has gained 25 pounds except all the weight was in my mid-section. It was easier when I was not pregnant and the weight of the baby felt different than running at my normal weight. But since I ran for the entire pregnancy the marathon was just the grand finale of my experience of keeping both myself and the baby healthy.

Q: Did you worry about stress on the body (or baby)?

A: I didn't worry because I exercised right through to the day I gave birth. When I became pregnant with my second child I knew I would exercise again until the day I gave birth. The womb can sustain a great deal. And I was aware of all the medical studies showing how important it is for athletes to maintain an exercise routine and just modify workouts. So I followed this regimen. I was always very aware of my body as most athletes are and took the race easy. I looked at the New York Marathon as a great journey for the baby and I, not as a race, so this was a non-competitive race in my mind.

Q: Did you wear any special support gear?

A: I wore compression pantyhose that were a nude colour so no one knew. I had really bad circulation in my legs during pregnancy and exercise was the only thing that really helped.

Q: Did you consult her doctor for advice, and if so what advice did he/she offer?

A: My doctor was really big on making sure that I ate healthy, stayed hydrated and thought safety first. If I was tired one day I would take a break. I always exercised with great caution and because of this I have an extremely active, happy and healthy three and five year old. Both children love fitness and sometimes I wonder if this is due to the fact that they have done this since conception.

Q: So, overall, it's safe to exercise while pregnant?

A: Yes, it is safe to continue a regular exercise routine throughout your pregnancy. Exercising during pregnancy can help your posture and decrease some discomforts that are common such as backaches and fatigue. In addition, many scientific reports in medical journals state exercise may prevent gestational diabetes (diabetes that develops during pregnancy) as well as relieve stress, and build the strength and endurance needed for labour and delivery.

Q: Should exercise be modified significantly while pregnant?

A: If you were physically active before your pregnancy, you should be able to keep exercising, just do so in moderation. Exercise at a lower level than your pre-pregnancy condition. Most importantly listen to your body. And don't let your heart rate go beyond 140 beats per minute.

But there are times when a pregnant woman should not exercise: If there are medical problems, such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes, exercise may not be advisable. Exercise may also be harmful if you have a pregnancy-related condition such as:

- Bleeding or spotting
- Low placenta
- Threatened or recurrent miscarriage
- Previous premature births or history of early labor
- Weak cervix

Talk with your physician before beginning an exercise program. Your health care provider can also give you personal exercise guidelines, based on your medical history.

Q: How can running and other forms of exercise improve a pregnancy?

A: Research shows that women who exercise during pregnancy suffer less lower-back pain, gain less weight, and have better mood and sleep patterns. After pregnancy, they're also less likely to suffer from postpartum depression and will lose weight more rapidly. I lost my pregnancy weight in less than a month because of my great health during pregnancy and through breastfeeding.

Q: What are your top tips for staying in shape safely while pregnant?

A: a) Think safety first. Make sure to always stay safe and listen to your body. This will guide you to make the right choices for both you and the growing baby inside of you.

b) Make sure you are eating enough. Since you are exercising you will need to consume additional calories. A pregnant woman requires 300 extra calories for the growing fetus. You will need additional calories for the exercise you are doing. For example, a 60-minute workout could require up to 600 calories additional to the 300 calories for baby. Make sure to eat healthily with plenty of vegetables, fruits and protein.

c) Take it easy. Have fun but don't worry about performance. Focus more on staying strong and healthy. I would go out on runs and try to ignore the time on my watch as my running times slowed down. So focus on taking it easy.

d) Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water for you and the baby growing inside of you. Carry a small bottle of water or purchase a belt that has a water holder.

e) Consult your doctor. Keep your doctor in touch with your pregnancy and also your fitness routine. If you feel any changes in your body notify your doctor immediately - no matter how small or insignificant.