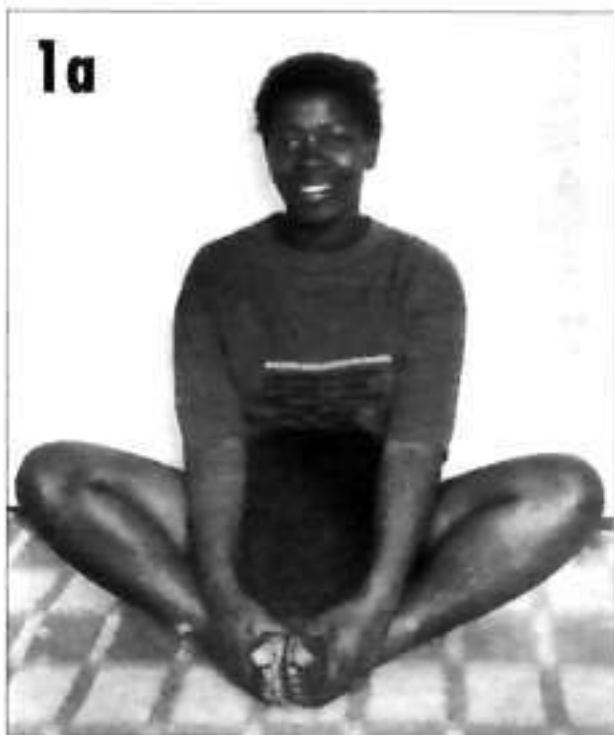


A healthy body means a healthy pregnancy

Healthy eating habits and proper exercise during pregnancy will help you a great deal when you go into labour. Exercising is good, but you have to know which exercises are good for you. Here are a few exercises you can do



1. Cobbler's pose

This exercise helps the pelvic organs by helping blood circulation in this area. It also helps to form the position of the pelvis correctly. You can do this exercise as often as you like and it can be used as a sitting position.

When sitting in this position, you should feel the inside of your thighs, vagina and hip joints stretching. You may also feel a stretch in your knees and ankles.

1a. Sit on the floor with your back straight and your legs



stretched out in front of you. You can use a wall to support your lower back.

Bend your knees and bring your feet close to your vagina.

Bring the bottoms of your feet together, with the outer sides of your feet resting on the floor.

Open out your thighs and lower your knees towards the floor.

Now breathe deeply.

1b. This is the same exercise as 1a. Make sure your back is straight and your arms are comfortable behind your back.



2a



2b

2. Kneeling with knees apart

This exercise releases tension in the vagina and pelvic joints and will help to improve your posture. It will also help take away the pain in your lower back. It opens the pelvis and lengthens and relaxes the muscles of your back, buttocks and pelvic floor. At the same time, it takes the weight you are carrying off your back.

Go only as far as you can without bending your back, and then stay there, breathing deeply. Once you are comfortable in this position, you may use it as often as you like.

You should feel the stretch mainly in the vagina and possibly in your knees and ankles.

2a. Kneel on the floor with your knees as wide apart as possible, your toes pointing in towards each other. If you can, sit between your feet with your buttocks on the floor. If this is too difficult, sit on your heels.

Bring your shoulder blades (at the back) down and towards each other. Lift your back up

pushing your shoulders up against your head.

Holding this position, move slowly forward from the hips, keeping your buttocks down as much as possible and your arms straight, until your hands reach the floor. You should begin to feel a stretch in the vagina.

Try making a gentle rocking movement, shifting your body weight from your arms to your legs.

Breathe deeply. Stay in this position for a minute or longer, and then come up.

2b. If you can do the movements of exercise 2a, try resting on your forearms, keeping your back straight. Check in a mirror that your back is straight or ask someone to see if it is straight.

3. Pelvic floor exercises

If you do this exercise often, it will help your pelvic-floor muscles relax. This will be helpful in the second stage of labour. It might also prevent a tear when giving birth.

This exercise should be done daily, especially in late pregnancy.

3a. It is important to remember that, if you have piles, you must do this exercise on your



hands and knees, with your head down and buttocks up. Stand with your feet about 60cm apart. Sit down on your toes in an easy position. Lean forward on to your hands, keeping your arms and back straight, and open your knees wide apart.

Tighten your pelvic-floor muscles, pulling them in as if you are trying to stop yourself from peeing. Hold for a few seconds and then slowly let go. Do this a few times.

Do the exercise again, this time letting go in four stages, little by little. Do the exercise again, this time picture your baby's head passing through your pelvis during the second stage of labour. Each time you breathe out, imagine that you are breathing your baby out as you release your pelvic muscles.

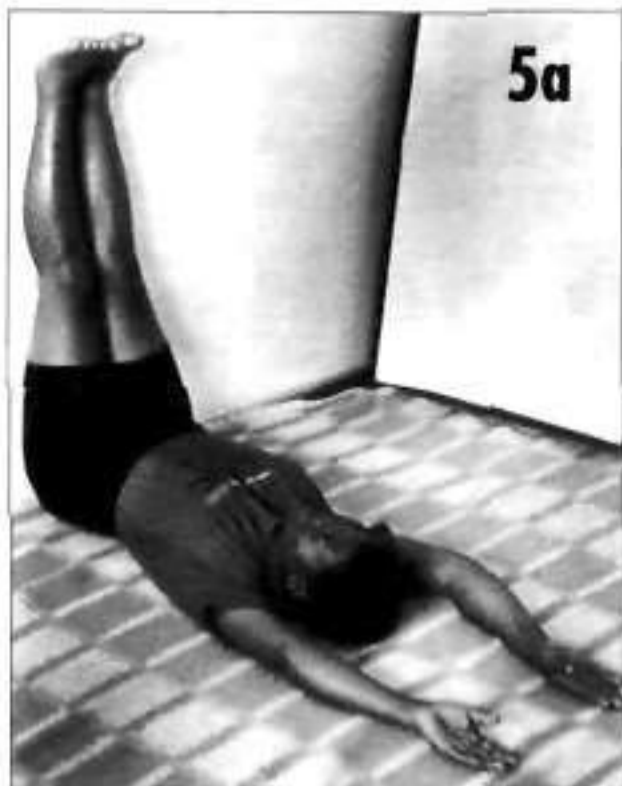
4. Pelvic tuck-in

During pregnancy, there is a lot of strain on your lower back because of the extra weight you are carrying.

Pulling in tightly and letting go your buttock muscles will strengthen your buttocks. This will increase support to your lower back and prevent back pain. This exercise also helps your pelvis stay in the position it should be. It may also relieve pain. It is good practice for labour: a gentle pelvic rocking movement can lessen pain and help the baby come out through the birth canal.

4a. Go on to the floor on your hands and knees. Your knees should be about 30cm apart.

4b. Pull in and tighten your buttocks, pulling in your pelvis



so that your back arches like a cat's. Hold for a few moments, then let go. Make sure your back remains straight when you let go. Do this over and over again. Do the same exercise a bit faster, rocking your pelvis gently up and down.

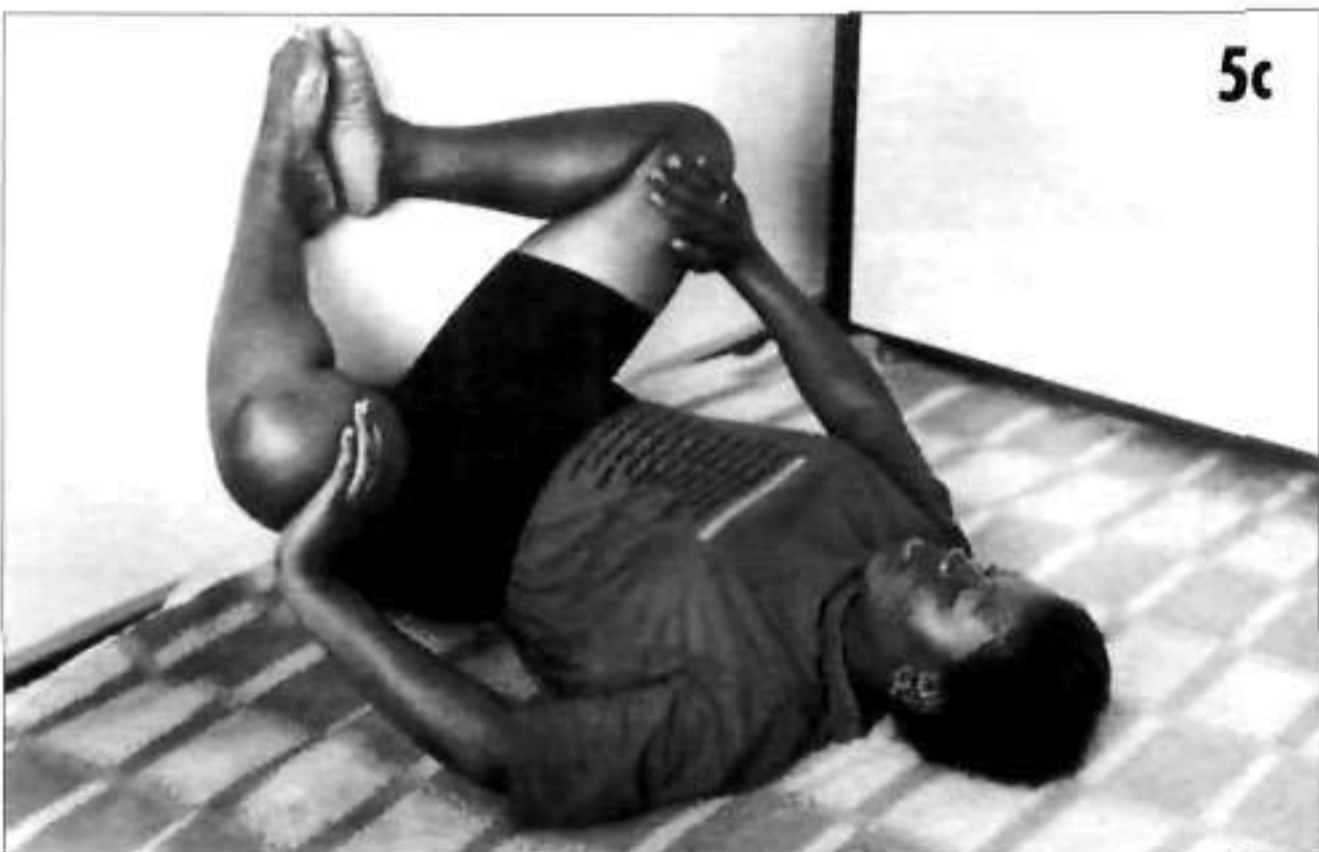
5. Legs against the wall

This exercise stretches the large muscles along the inside of your thighs from the pubic bone to the knees.

Remember: During pregnancy, especially in the last weeks, some women find they become dizzy if they lie flat on their backs. This is caused by the weight of the heavy uterus pressing down on blood vessels which slows down blood circulation. If this happens to you or if you are uncomfortable, do not do any exercises which involve this position.

When doing this exercise, you will feel a stretch in the inner thighs. You will feel stiff in the beginning, but with a little practice it will go away.

5a. Sit down sideways next to a wall, so that one hip is touching the wall. Turn round until your legs go up the wall and your buttocks are close to or



touching the wall. Stretch your arms over your head on to the floor. Straighten your legs up the wall.

5b. Bend your knees as if you are sitting. Place your feet flat against the wall and stretch your arms up over your head on to the floor. This is the resting position. Breathe deeply into your stomach, and relax your back so there is no gap between your lower back and the floor.

5c. Bring the bottoms of your feet together, close to your body. Press your knees towards the wall with your hands.

When you finish this exercise, roll over slowly on to your

side, wait a second and then come up on your hands again.

It is important to exercise all the time. Regular exercises and healthy eating habits will prepare you well for giving birth.

But, before you begin to exercise, check with a doctor at the clinic if it is okay for you to go ahead. Many clinics and hospitals offer exercise classes. It can be more fun doing it with other pregnant women than doing it alone. Your partner must help you when doing some of the exercises.

Ask your doctor or a nurse at the clinic for more information on the different exercises for pregnant women. ❖