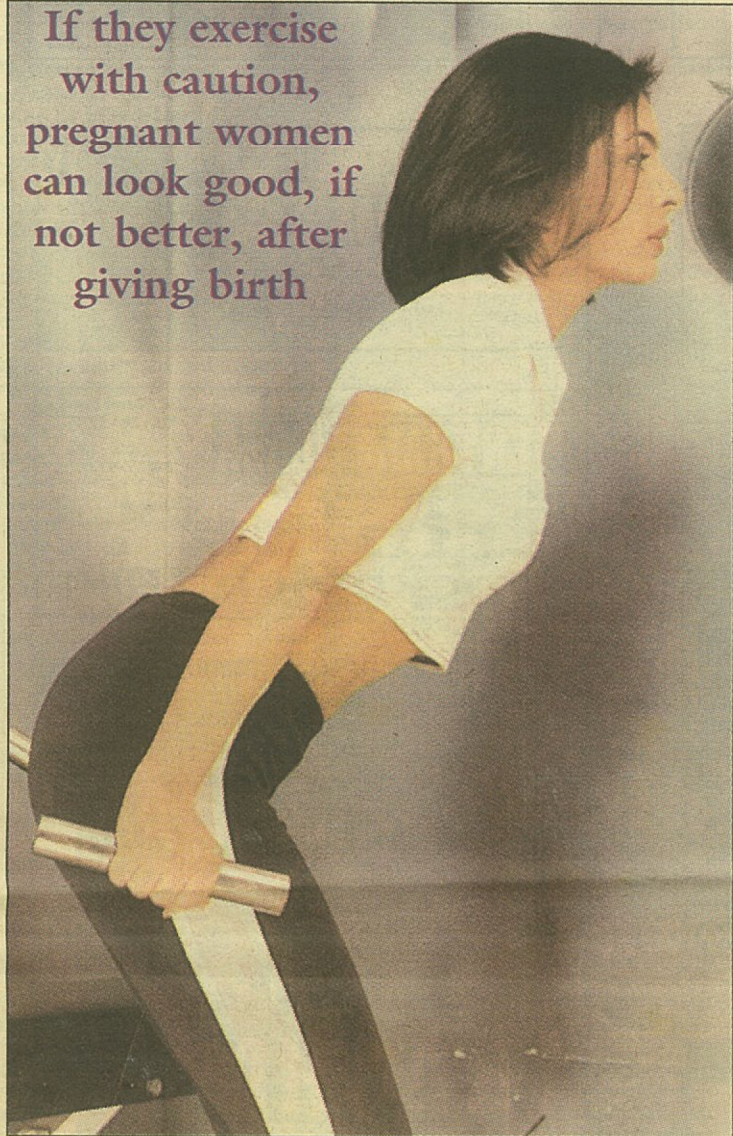




nawaz modi
perfect fit

The pregnant exerciser

If they exercise with caution, pregnant women can look good, if not better, after giving birth



A tricep kickback to tone and strengthen the back of the arms

OVER and over again, we've seen women look just as good, if not better, after childbirth. If you put in the effort, it can be done.

By working out diligently and safely, improving eating habits, increasing rest, eliminating bad habits and receiving adequate prenatal care, a pregnant exerciser can become healthier than before.

Women are often unaware that pregnancy, labour and delivery are like training for, and participating in, a major athletic event. All organs and systems are affected. They are stressed enormously in the preparation, formation and growth of the baby.

Did you know that the uterus enlarges 10-15 times within a span of 36 weeks? No other muscle or organ has such a fantastic ability to grow in such a short span of time.

ACHIEVABLE GOALS DURING PREGNANCY

Cardiovascular fitness: Can be maintained and even improved during pregnancy. One will enjoy greater levels of energy to get through the day. Women can increase their muscular strength during pregnancy, thereby automatically reducing the risk of injury.

A pregnant woman also improves her posture substantially by developing her musculo-skeletal system. Strengthening the abdominals, counteracts lordosis, a common postural deviation during pregnancy. Working on upper-body strength can prevent rounded shoulders. Improving posture improves a pregnant woman's stability.

Flexibility is an attainable and desirable goal during pregnancy.

Psychological well-being: Improved self-image and body

image are easily gained when pregnant women exercise in a supportive environment. Avoid excessive weight gain, but learn to cope comfortably with a healthy increase in body weight. This will prevent the pregnant woman from feeling alienated from her body. Exercise can also reduce anxiety and stress.

Exercise and the birth process: There is no scientific evidence available to corroborate the view that exercise will ease labour by making it easier or shorter, or that the risk of complications will be diminished.

However, exercise contributes towards improved endurance or stamina, a great asset during labour. One is better able to use the correct muscles, apply the right amount of pressure and effectively relax those muscles not directly involved in the different stages of labour.

Exercise also increases ones awareness of correct breathing and its impact on muscular efficiency. The ability to breathe with control is of great aid to a woman's management of her own labour.

Finally, compared to if you didn't exercise at all, exercise helps you regain your original shape and size much faster post-pregnancy.

TAKE INTO CAREFUL CONSIDERATION

Although pregnant women are not weak, fragile creatures, many issues need to be understood and considered, and alterations made accordingly.

A capacity for physical work will decrease during the first trimester, increase during the second (although not to pre-pregnancy levels) and reduce again in the third.

As hormone production (estrogen and progesterone) increases, one may feel nauseous, irritable, experience dramatic mood-swings or feel

just plain God-awful.

At the end of the first trimester, even when at rest, the heart has to work 40 per cent harder than usual. The heart rate increases by 10 beats per minute. That's a stupendous 14,000 extra times each day!

As a result of all this, your blood pressure may become higher and your body temperature increase.

As the baby grows bigger and becomes heavier, your centre of gravity will constantly change. One may find that their balance is off, and that they feel awkward and clumsy. As a result of your internal organs shifting or being pushed out of the way, you may find the pressure on your bladder mounting, and you might need to get to the bathroom more often than before.

The body releases a hormone called relaxin during pregnancy, which results in ligament, muscle, tendon and joint laxity. This is essential in order to accommodate the growing foetus. So you may find that you're more flexible than before.

Breasts may become very tender as a result of all the new vessels and ducts that are developing. The thyroid may become slightly larger as a result of the enlargement of the pituitary gland. The placenta also produces a hormone that causes the thyroid to enlarge. There'll be an increase in white-blood-cell production to help you fight infections.

These changes warrant attention as they can make you more vulnerable to injury. Prenatal exercise must be designed to meet these special needs. As long as one begins slowly and progresses at a comfortable pace, the risk of injury is minimal.

DOS & DON'TS

The following guidelines aim at making your exercise sessions more comfortable and effective while focussing on safety.

See your gynaec: Always consult with your doctor or gynaec before you embark on an exercise programme. Make sure you get his/her recommendations or restrictions as far as exercise goes. Each one of us is individual and needs individual advice and attention.

Always warm up and cool down: A minimum of five to seven minutes for both a warm-up and cool-down are essential. Include limbering and whole-body moves along with stretches. The warm-up will help you stretch out, and get the heart, lungs and muscles ready for exercise. It's also a very important tool in injury prevention. The cool-down helps you stretch and relax the muscles you have worked so hard, while eliminating the waste products of exercise from your system. It will return your circulation and metabolism to resting levels.

Don't put up with pain or discomfort: Pain and discomfort are signs to stop. Listen to your body. Remember that a change in the baby's position can make a particular exercise comfortable at one point in time and uncomfortable at another. In pregnancy, the old saying, 'no pain, no gain' is nonsense and can be outright dangerous.

Breathe: Never hold your breath. Doing this can raise your blood pressure, cause headaches and dizziness, and put too much pressure on the abdomen. Breathe freely, deeply and regularly.

Heart rate: Low to moderate intensities are preferred during pregnancy. Never go high on intensity. This can lead to serious damage. Your heart-rate range is best worked out and monitored in conjunction with your physical trainer.

Instructor: Ideally, let a well-trained, qualified fitness instructor tailor an effective, low-impact workout for you. Among other things, he/she will eliminate all cross-body moves, as the abdomen interferes, and all forward-bending moves, as they may cause dizziness. Hyperflexion of the joints, such as deep-knee plies, must also be avoided, as the increased joint laxity we discussed earlier can lead to joint damage, if one is not careful.

Finally, remember to do what you comfortably can. Don't try and compete with your former self. Do as much, or as little, as your body comfortably allows.

FOR STARTERS

A few simple exercises you can begin with.

The exercise in fig 1 strengthens and tones the inner thighs.



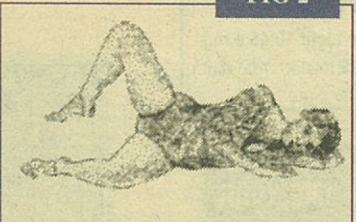
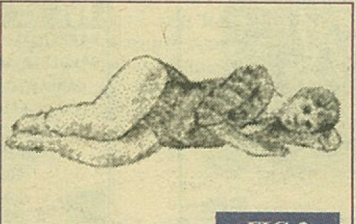
FIG 1



FIG 2

Sit leaning up against a wall, with your knees bent and the soles of your feet together. Cross your arms and place your hands on the inner side of your thighs above the knee joints. Take a deep breath in, and while breathing out try to press your knees together as you gently resist with your hands. Start by doing two sets of eights.

The exercise in fig 2 strengthens and tones the outer thighs and hips.



While lying down on your side as demonstrated, lift the outer leg up as you breathe out, and lower it without allowing it to touch the lower leg, as you breathe in.

Begin by doing two sets of eights on each leg.

In fig 3, the abdominals are being worked. Sitting with your knees apart and bent, arms extended out parallel to the floor. Slowly roll back halfway to sitting up and lying down. Keep the chin close to your chest and your spine rounded.

Slowly return back to the upright position. Start by doing this six to eight times, and then gradually build it up to 15.

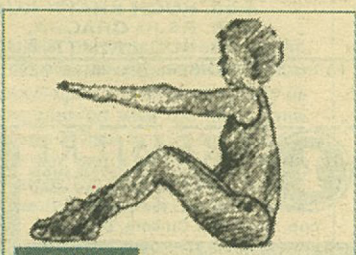


FIG 1

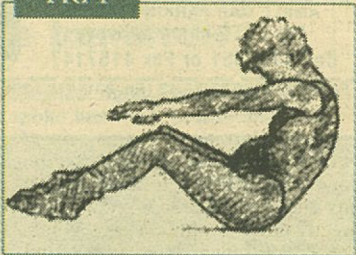


Fig 4 demonstrates what we can call a mini-push-up. It strengthens and tones the arms, chest, upper back and shoulders.

Standing about two feet away from the wall with your feet shoulder-width apart, place your hands on the wall at shoulder level. Bend your arms to the extent where the upper body is almost touching the wall. Don't let the back arch, your butt jut out or the pelvic region sag forward. Breathe out and push yourself slowly away from the wall without letting your elbows lock. Start with five repetitions and gradually build it up to 15.

Before you embark on any fitness regimen, remember to fully under-



FIG 1



stand the implications of pregnancy, the changes one undergoes physically, psychologically and emotionally, and the possible effects of exercise on the same.

You should be aware of the common discomforts of pregnancy, and warning signals to stop exercising. Discuss them freely with your medical practitioner and trainer. Get information from your trainer about appropriate clothing and footwear. Your trainer will make significant changes in the mode, duration, frequency and intensity of the workout.

Nothing should be done without the knowledge, consent and written medical clearance of your gynaec.

Remember, healthy mothers produce healthy babies! All the best!