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Training for the Sport of Motherhood

BY ILENE BERGELSON

What would you do to prepare for a sport that involved carrying weight that is both separate from as well as attached to your body? And since all the skills required for this sport are executed while your body's systems are undergoing tremendous change — i.e. you experience swelling, are prone to hypoglycemia and your joints are lax — would you say that as an athlete you have special fitness training needs? You bet.

In my book, classifying motherhood as a sport is not a question, it's a given.

Let's look at what a mom does "pre-game" (before birth):

*Bending – Lifting – Carrying – Twisting – Multi-tasking
Balancing – Preparing for labor and delivery (its own game!) –
and the very activity that led to pregnancy in the first place!*

And all these activities are performed while possibly enduring nausea and with increasing amounts of weight attached to the body asymmetrically, acting on the entire musculoskeletal system.

Raising Children

What about the "game" itself — after she's given birth. Add:

Maneuvering a car seat, portable playpen or stroller – Leaning over a changing table, crib or playpen while lifting weight – Squatting – Crawling – Tossing / catching / turning / twisting / twirling / rocking / burping a small floppy weight (baby) – Bathing said small, floppy and now slippery weight over a tub – Possibly nursing.

These activities often start right away, while the postpartum mom is still in recovery. All you moms out there: You are amazing athletes with a season that lasts for years, and the big kickoff is less than a year away from the time you join the team. So what are we waiting for? Let's go!

Live by the Three F's

When I teach other fitness professionals about prenatal training, I tell them that moms must always have access to three things: snacks, water and a toilet. One of my students came up with calling these essentials the Three F's:

Food, Fluid, Facilities....Keep all three close-by!

Also important:

Wear comfortable, layered clothing that wicks moisture away and allows you to move – The baby comes first, before your widening hips or droopy bottoms – All exercise must support the development of the baby – Work to fatigue, not exhaustion – Give yourself a 5-10 minute warm-up and cool-down EVERY TIME, even if it cuts into your workout – Use lighter than your normal weights – Stretch MODERATELY, no matter how good it feels to do more – Do not hold your breath while exercising – After the first trimester, avoid lying flat on your back for extended periods of time – prop



your head and upper back to support proper blood flow – Rise from lying or seated positions gradually to avoid a drop in blood pressure – Avoid standing in place for extended periods to avoid blood pooling – Consult your medical professional regarding altitude and acclimatization – Weight loss is NEVER recommended during pregnancy, even if the mother is obese.

Getting the Most Out of Group

If you take group fitness classes, ALWAYS tell the instructor if you are pregnant or postpartum.

Notify them of:

Any complications – Special considerations from your treating medical professional – What week of your pregnancy or recovery you are in – If and when you have had any medical procedures – Your recent activity history and current activity level – Also helpful: Stand near a door, wall or corner where there is less likelihood of others bumping into you.

Birth is a New Beginning For Mom, Too

Bouncing back from pregnancy requires the same consideration as pregnancy itself. Wait for the OK from your medical professional before resuming a full exercise regime, and ask about what is safe to start in one, two, four and six weeks. In the meantime, start reconditioning your pelvic floor at home, and sleep when you can!

Many prenatal considerations such as lax joints are still part of the picture for two to three months after giving birth. Start back gradually, and don't be shy about asking your fitness pro questions!

Exercise has proven to be very beneficial for moms. Working out with a perinatal (pre and post) qualified fitness professional can help you positively support bodily changes, cope well during pregnancy and bounce back after giving birth. Train like the athlete you are! ■

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