

There is probably no better type of exercise during pregnancy than stretching. Many people neglect stretching because they don't know it's benefits or because they think it takes too much time. But when you see how easy it can be and how great it can make you feel, you won't miss another stretching session! It can make you look and feel better, and it will prevent many of the common aches, pains and injuries associated with pregnancy. Most of us think of dancers or gymnasts when we think of stretching. These flexible people can put their bodies in positions we can't even imagine, especially when we're pregnant. So how do they do that? Muscle. Muscle actively moves bones. Without our muscles, we would just be a pile of bones on the floor. In order to move our body, our muscles must contract, and a stretch is the opposite of a contraction.

There are two kinds of stretching: AROM (Active Range of Motion) and PROM (Passive Range of Motion). AROM

happens when you move your body by yourself using only your own muscle. PROM is where your body moves with assistance, such as with the help of a trainer, a door or a stretching accessory. During pregnancy, you should stick with AROM stretching. Right now, your body is producing a hormone called relaxin, and the purpose of this hormone is to help loosen your ligaments around your joints. Simply stated, relaxin is a hormone to help you "open up" for childbirth. But the relaxin is in every joint in your body, not just your pelvis. For this reason, pregnant women can over-stretch their bodies and harm themselves, and this happens most often during PROM stretching.

J.J. Flizanes, owner of Invisible Fitness and Stroller Strides® Manhattan Beach, created this stretching program exclusively for ePregnancy magazine. The program includes a handful of AROM stretches that can be done safely throughout pregnancy. Add this program to your daily

Photographer: Don Diaz

Model: Jesse Golden/Expecting Models

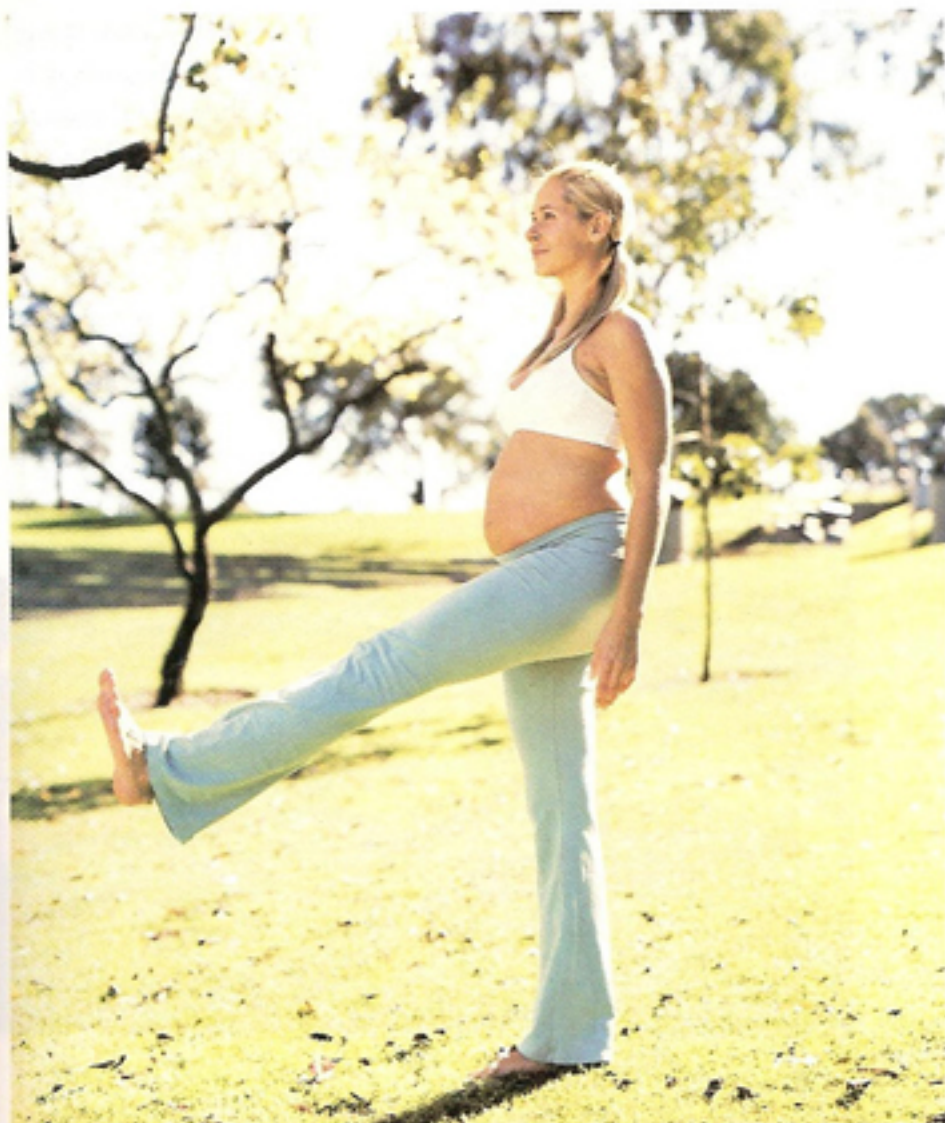
Trainer: J.J. Flizanes

Hair and Makeup: Kim Collea

Clothes: LUCY (Lucy.com)

routine (okay, at least three times per week) or do the stretches by themselves in the morning or at night.

Remember to listen to your body. Take the stretches to a point of mild discomfort but never pain. Breathe and relax into each stretch, and learn to find peace within each stretch. Always stretch in a slow, controlled manner; never bounce into position. And remember that when you want to lengthen a muscle, you need to contract the opposite muscle. You also need to remember that there are safety concerns for exercising in the supine position after your first trimester. For safety's sake, do only standing stretches in your second and third trimesters.



## ◀ Hip Flexion and Ankle Dorsiflexion

This is the hamstring stretch. Stand upright with good posture. Flex one leg in front of you with a locked knee, and dorsiflex your ankle (point the toes towards you rather than away from you). Again, concentrate on lengthening the muscle as you hold the stretch. Do this stretch a few times on both legs, holding it for about 30 seconds each time.



## ◀ Side Bend

Walk yourself into a yoga warrior-2 position (or a lunge) with your bent leg's foot pointing away from you and your straight leg's foot facing the same direction you are. Slowly lower yourself down to your bent leg and rest your forearm on it. Take the other hand and reach it up with energy to the sky, then pull your shoulder and back muscles up and toward your fingers. This is a great stretch for the obliques (side muscles) and lats. Be sure to keep your pelvis square, and don't rotate toward your bent leg. Hold this stretch for a minute, then gently switch to the other side.

## ▼ Cat Stretch

Kneel on all fours with your hands positioned directly under your shoulders and your knees slightly wider than your hips. Slowly round your back up, tucking your tailbone under and drawing your belly-button up toward your spine. Then, for

the second phase of the exercise, draw your tailbone up, pull your shoulders back and let your back sink down to the floor. Do both phases slowly, holding each one for at least 30 seconds and doing 5-8 slow repetitions. This is a favorite exercise

among pregnant women who want to feel their belly hang down away from them and release pressure on their spine. It helps strengthen weakened abdominal muscles and stretch shortened, tight back muscles.





## ▲ Hip Extension and Knee

This stretch is for the quadriceps (the front of your thighs). In a standing position, keep your spine upright and extend one leg behind you while balancing on the other. Once your leg reaches the furthest

position at which your hip will extend, flex your knee. You will feel your hamstring contract, which then releases and stretches your quadriceps and hip flexors. Concentrate on lengthening the muscle as

you hold the stretch — lengthening the muscle is more important than achieving a static hold of the stretch — and do it 3-4 times for 30 seconds on each side.



## ◀ Child's Pose

After you do the Cat Stretch, spread your legs a little wider so your belly will fit between your knees and sit back on your heels. Walk your fingers out in front of you gently and let your head drop. If you concentrate on pushing your pelvis down toward your feet as you reach with your fingers away from you, this will be a lower-back stretch. You will also be releasing your latissimus dorsi (back), trapezius (between your neck and shoulders) and shoulder muscles. You can do this for 1-2 minutes.