

prenatal workout (part 2)

In this second series, Audrey D’Cotta from The Moving Body demonstrates pilates-based exercises to tone your lower body

Photos by Gabriel Pang

Lower back problems are common among expectant women. Here are ways to ease your aches as well as prepare your body for a smooth delivery.

1. Teaser and leg circles On Elbows

BENEFITS: To strengthen the lower body and shoulders. Improve pelvic stability.

START POSITION:

- Seated on the floor with knees bent and resting on the elbows, one leg is bent and the other is straight. Ensure that you reach your elbows into the ground and stay wide across the front of the chest. The pelvis is slightly scooped to enable the lower back to be in a slight curl.

MOVEMENT:

- 8 repetitions each leg for teaser
- 4 repetitions each direction for circles.

TEASER

- Inhale to reach the elbows into the ground and emphasise width across the front of the chest and shoulders.
- Exhale to raise the straight leg up towards the ceiling flexing the foot, inhale to lower the leg down pointing the foot.
- The rest of the body stays still whilst the leg is moving.

CIRCLES

- Inhale to reach the elbows into the ground and emphasise width across the front of the chest and shoulders.
- Exhale to circle the leg in a circular motion clockwise without moving the rest of the body.
- Repeat 4 repetitions in the other direction.





2. Sidekick

BENEFITS: To strengthen the waist and lower body, especially the buttocks. Improve the torso's ability to balance. Circle variation loosens the hips.

START POSITION:

- Sidelying on the mat with head, shoulder blades and back of pelvis in a straight line with a slight arch at the back of the belly button.
- Legs can be straight in line with the torso or slightly angled in front of the body to make it easier to balance.
- Head is propped up on one elbow, the free arm is resting on the mat in front of the body or resting on the top hip for added challenge. Keep the bottom waist off the mat.

MOVEMENT:

6 repetitions for each variation

RAISES

- Inhale to raise the top leg as you flex the foot without moving the rest of the body.
- Exhale to lower the leg down flexing the foot.

SIDEKICKS

- Inhale to raise the leg in a horizontal alignment with the torso
- Exhale to reach the leg behind whilst pointing the foot, inhale to bring the leg forward in front of the body whilst flexing the foot. Ensure the torso stays still.





CIRCLES

- Inhale to raise the leg in a horizontal alignment with the torso
- Exhale to circle the leg behind whilst pointing the foot, inhale to bring the leg forward in front of the body whilst flexing the foot to complete the circle. Ensure the torso stays still as you circle the legs around. The size of the circles are determined by how well you can keep the torso still.



3. Calf Stretch on all fours

BENEFITS: Strengthens and stretches the calves. Good for preventing calf cramps in the second and third trimesters.



START POSITION:

- On hands and knees in an all fours position with arms and one thigh vertical to the mat. Other leg is straight with the toes tucked under the ankle resting the weight of the leg on the ball of the foot. The foot is in a vertical alignment to the mat
- Spine in a neutral position: Head, shoulder blades and back of pelvis in a horizontal line with a slight arch at the back of the belly button.

MOVEMENT:

8 repetitions each side

- Inhale to use the ball of the foot to push the body forward, working the calf and foot. The heel is in front of the ball of the foot.
- Exhale to flex the foot and allow the calf to stretch as the heel moves behind the ball of the foot.

4. Knee Hovers

BENEFITS: strengthen the core and upper body.

START POSITION:

- On hands and knees in an all fours position with arms and thighs vertical to the mat.
- Spine in a neutral position: Head, shoulder blades and back of pelvis in a horizontal line with a slight arch at the back of the belly button.



MOVEMENT:

8 repetitions each side if doing 1 variation only, 4 repetitions each side if doing both variations

BEGINNER

- Inhale to elongate the spine, exhale to hover both knees off the ground at the same time keeping the knees 2 inches off the ground only. Maintain neutral spine alignment. Hold the position for 8 secs before returning to the start position

ADVANCE

- Inhale to extend one leg behind with the toes tucked under the ankle resting the weight of the leg on the ball of the foot. Exhale to bend the leg and return it. Repeat on the other side. Maintain neutral spine alignment throughout the exercise.
- Inhale to elongate the spine, exhale to hover both knees off the ground at the same time keeping the knees 2 inches off the ground

only. Straighten one leg followed by the other. Try to maintain plank position with neutral spine alignment for up to 8 seconds before returning to start position. Return to start position if you feel a lower back strain.



5. Wide Squat with heel raise

BENEFIT: Strengthens and stretches the calves and inner thighs in preparation for delivery. Improves balance.



START POSITION:

- Stand with feet wider than hips with thighs rotated outwards and knees still in alignment with the second toes.
- Standing in neutral spine alignment: Head, shoulder blades and back of pelvis in a vertical line with a slight arch at the back of the belly button.

MOVEMENT:

8 repetitions

- Inhale to elongate the spine and align the torso over the legs
- Exhale to bend the knees and perform a wide squat, coming as low as you can keep your spine vertical over the legs.
- Inhale to lift both heels off the ground keeping your balance.
- Exhale to lower the heels back on the ground.
- Inhale to straighten the legs and return to the start.

