

# Black Belt Essay

## My Pregnancy and Taekwon-Do

As with any exercise and pregnancy, there are some risks involved when combining the two.

Once you have found out that you are pregnant, and you would like to continue or start exercising, you should consult your Doctor or specialist first. There may be overriding complications or risks such as high blood pressure, toxemia etc.

When I first thought I was pregnant, I was so excited. I rushed off straight to the doctors. I naturally had a long list of questions, and one of those was 'Would it be O.K to continue with Taekwon-Do?' As I was in good physical shape and reasonably fit, I was told it wouldn't be a problem. But obviously there were going to have to be a few changes to the way I trained.

The doctor told me that it was best to keep my exercise levels as that as of before I was pregnant or to reduce it. It could be hazardous to be more vigorous. At a certain level of exertion, blood is diverted away from the uterus where the baby is, and can cause damage to the foetus.

I was also told to avoid saunas, hot tubs, spas etc. as these places cause dehydration. This increases the body temperature drastically and can cause birth defects.

I learnt that my body will tell me when to slow down, so, listen to it.

My first instance of this was at the instructors' course in Palmerston North 1997. Everytime I happened to do anything physical, I had to excuse myself from Mr Lowe to go and 'throw up'! Funny how morning sickness is 24 hours a day!!

I continued club training up until I was about 6 months pregnant. The further along I was, the less I found I could do. Early pregnancy didn't affect me much. I just had to be careful when doing work with partners, pad work and of course sparring. I decided to stop sparring altogether at two months pregnant. Even though the foetus is only 2.5 cm long, accidents happen. It only takes a strike to the abdomen to endanger the baby. Even though it is well cushioned, a sudden blow to the abdomen may cause premature separation of the placenta. (An event that can kill the baby).

As my ever-increasing tummy expanded week by week, I found classes harder to participate in. Patterns were the easiest to do as long as I did them 'low impact'.

The strangest thing was that I kept losing my balance. Even with a simple kick like a front snap kick, I was tilting over and unsteady. This was because my centre of gravity had changed. I was also having problems with my feet being swollen and with general tiredness as I was standing all day at my full time job.

I did some pad work. Hand techniques weren't a problem but with kicks I just performed them in slow motion and as technically correct as I could, rather than hit them with any force. I also couldn't hold the pads. My tummy was just too fat. I was more of a hindrance than help and there was always the thought of that sway kick missing the pads in the back of my mind.

Stretching was a big help to me. I found it both relaxing and comforting to know that I could still do something. I did a lot of stretching in class while the rest of them were doing more strenuous exercises (i.e.: flying side kicks over chairs). I stretched right up until I was ready to burst. It was a lot easier to do any stretching on a nice soft carpeted floor. I found it difficult to do some stretching as it hard enough to see my toes let alone touch them! I felt like a beached whale.

Resuming exercise after giving birth depends on many factors.

1. Was it a 'normal birth'?

If so, you can probably resume activity as soon as there's no pain. Obviously the body needs time to recover. Pregnancy, labour, and delivery are hard work. Hard work is easier and safer for both mother and baby if the mother is physically fit.

2. Harder labours involving an episiotomy or caesarean will need a much longer recovery time.

Unfortunately I had an extremely difficult 30-hour labour which ended in a caesarean. I had to put any ideas of returning to Taekwon-Do on the back burner for a while. I had planned to be back instructing my new club within 2-3 weeks. Luckily it had been previously planned that my husband (Mr Neill Livingstone 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan), had organised to run my club until I was up and running. I was given the all clear from the specialist at 6 weeks. I eased into training and teaching slowly but surely. Thankfully it was a new club so they were all white belts. This made it a little easier, as I didn't have to go straight into jumping kicks and other advanced techniques.

Sacrifices play a large part in pregnancy, ranging from loss of physique, social and sports time to lack of a 2<sup>nd</sup> income.

I certainly had to sacrifice many Taekwon-Do options such as Camps, Seminars, Regionals and Nationals. I was either pregnant and 'unfit' to be attending or now, I have to look after my daughter.

Probably in 'normal' circumstances, the other partner would look after the baby, but since both my husband and I are instructors, we both would like to attend events. He feels guilty if he goes and I stay, and visa versa, therefore we both often stay at home. Occasionally we can call on a family member to baby-sit while we train together at our clubs, or do extra training but this is rare.

There have often been times when things don't go the way you plan them. Now that a little person is involved there are always unforeseen circumstances. I would get all ready to go and do some training when she decided to get stroppy, poop her nappy, wanted to go to sleep or be teething and just wanted to be cuddled or held. Consequently training gets sacrificed for yet another day.

If all went well, I used Jaime's sleep time to do some training .I manage a few press-ups, sit ups and some skipping in between hanging out the nappies and the vacuuming. If it's a sunny day, I put Jaime on the lawn with me while I practised my patterns. She usually cracks up laughing wondering 'what on earth is my mother doing?' It's very hard to concentrate with a smiling, laughing little face watching, but I trudge on.

She is also my incentive to get out walking to keep fit. Jaime is my little training buddy.

Maybe one day she will be in the same situation herself. A Black Belt Taekwon-Do mum.

Jaime is not always with me training, but she is always in my thoughts. I don't regret for one moment the sacrifices I've made to bring my precious child into this world.

**Kirsten Livingstone 1Dan**

## **Overview**

### **Warnings**

- 1) Exercise during pregnancy only if your pregnancy is normal and without complications.
- 2) Check with your doctor before exercise during pregnancy, to be sure its o.k to do so.

## **Danger signs**

- 1) Pain
- 2) Bleeding
- 3) Rupture of membranes
- 4) No kicking or foetal movement

## **Remember**

- 1) Listen to your body
- 2) Avoid fatigue and excessive heat
- 3) Stop exercising and see your doctor immediately if any problems arise.

Every pregnancy is different. These are some of my experiences. Being pregnant and having children does not mean the end of Taekwon-Do, just an adjustment.

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## **Bibliography**

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