

## Testing Your Strength

• **Upper body.** The bench-press test is just what it sounds like: a test involving a bench-press-style move. We've modified it here so you don't need to belong to a gym (with barbells and fancy machines) to get a sense of your upper-body strength. What you will need are handheld weights in the 2- to 5-pound range (they'll also come in handy if you want to increase the challenge of some of the moves in our workouts). If you don't have weights, use soup cans or bottled water instead.

Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor a comfortable distance from your rear end. **If you're in your second or third trimester, place several pillows behind your back, so your head and shoulders are higher than your abdomen, at about a 45-degree angle to the floor. If you feel dizzy even in this position, add another pillow.** Hold a soup can or weight no heavier than 5 pounds in each hand. Start with your hands at shoulder height, shoulder-width apart, elbows pointing out to the sides. The backs of your hands should be facing your shoulders. Extend your arms straight up toward the ceiling perpendicular to your body, until your elbows are only slightly bent. Lower the weights to the starting position. Repeat as many times as you can. **CAUTION:** Keep breathing as you do the move, exhaling when you push the weight up and inhaling as you lower it.

Record the number of times you can do the move. Remember, there is no right or wrong amount. If your arms tire after just three to five presses, you'll know that your upper body is an area that could use improvement. If you feel like you could keep on lifting, congratulations. Start doing our fitness routines, and you'll stay strong throughout your pregnancy—and be more than ready to meet the challenges of motherhood.

• **Middle body.** Check for a diastasis before you do this test, and, if you have one, skip it. (To determine whether you have a diastasis, see page 30.) In the crunch test, the point is to do as many crunches as you can. There's no time limit. In fact, you shouldn't try to do them too quickly and risk getting winded. What you'll need: an exercise mat or towel. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor, a comfortable distance from your rear end. Keep your arms at your sides with your hands flat on the mat. **If you're in your second or third trimester, place several pillows behind your back, so your head and shoulders are higher than your abdomen.**

To do your crunches, lift your head, neck, and shoulder blades upward, sliding the palms of your hands along the towel or mat 2 to 3 inches. As

you lift, exhale and pull your abdominal muscles in toward your spine. Return to the starting position. (If you're propped up by pillows, focus on keeping the effort in your abdominals. It's easy to let your hip flexors, the muscles at the front of your hips, do the work from this position.) Continue doing this move until you feel the first twinge of fatigue in your abdominal muscles. Record your results.

A reasonably fit nonpregnant woman should be able to do at least fifteen to twenty-five crunches before collapsing in a heap. If you're way shy of either mark, it's important to work slowly to strengthen your abs. In any case, as you start doing the abdominal moves in the exercise routines in this book, use the results of this test as a guide to the number of crunches you can do comfortably.

• **Pelvic floor.** We explained to you how to find your PC muscle in the "Muscle Guide" (see page 16). Now's the time to see how strong it is. Sitting in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, your legs spread slightly, squeeze your PC muscle. Can you hold the contraction for 10 seconds? If so, your PC muscle is fairly strong. If, on the other hand, it starts to quiver and quake in less than 5 seconds, you've got some serious Kegels—exercises that strengthen your PC muscle—in your future. Record your results. This is one area in which you're bound to see remarkable improvements.

• **Lower body.** You're going to assess the strength of your thighs and glutes with the squat test. Hold a 5-pound weight (or a soup can) in each hand. Stand with your feet about hip-width apart, your arms hanging down at your sides. First, contract your PC muscle, then bend your knees until your thighs are parallel to the floor. If you're having trouble estimating how far to squat, put a chair behind you. When your butt touches the chair, you're down far enough. (We suggest you contract the PC muscle first to counteract the pressure squatting will put on your vulnerable vaginal area.) **If you're in your second or third trimester, do only a quarter squat: Bend your knees, sitting back on your heels, until your torso is a quarter of the way to the floor.** Return to the starting position and repeat. Keep your knees in line with your ankles. When you bend your knees, you should still be able to see your toes, or better yet, be able to lift your toes off the floor. Don't lock your knees when you stand up in between squats.

Stop when your muscles feel the first twinge of fatigue or when you're unable to maintain your form—if you lose your balance, if you start bending forward at the waist, or if your heels pop up off the floor. Record your results. This exercise is tough, so don't be disappointed if you can only do three or four. Just keep your results in mind as you begin the lower-body exercises in this book.

## Testing Your Flexibility

- **Shoulders.** Hold a towel in your right hand. Point your right elbow toward the ceiling and reach your right hand down your back between your shoulder blades, so that the towel is dangling down your back. Now put your left arm behind you, with your left elbow pointing toward the floor. Reach your left hand up toward your right hand. Grab the towel as high up as you can. If you can reach all the way to your other hand, your shoulders are nice and flexible. If there's an inch or more of towel between your two hands, you are more likely to suffer from shoulder and neck pain, especially as pregnancy progresses, unless you make an effort to loosen the area. Now try the other side. Don't be surprised if one side is significantly more limber than the other. If you do our stretching routines regularly, you'll notice a big improvement on your tight side.
- **Upper back.** Lie on your back with your lower back touching the floor (or as close as you can come to it). Reach straight overhead with your arms, then drop them to the floor above you. If your arms touch the floor easily and your lower back stays in contact with the floor, your upper back is fairly flexible. If you can't touch the floor, or if your back arches when you try, you may be susceptible to upper back and shoulder pain—both of which are more likely now that your breasts are larger.
- **Lower back and hamstrings.** Sit on the floor with your legs together and reach your arms straight out toward your toes. Keep your spine as straight as possible (slumping is cheating!) and bend at the hips instead of the waist. If it feels like your belly is getting in the way, spread your legs slightly. If you can reach past your toes, you're superflexible and should take care not to overstretch as you do our stretching exercises. If you can touch or almost touch your toes, you're doing well. If you can't reach past the tops of your ankles, you may struggle with lower back pain.
- **Quadriceps.** Holding on to a wall or chair back with your left hand for support, kick your right foot up behind you and grasp it with your right hand. If your heel touches or nearly touches your rear, your quadriceps are nice and long. Switch hands and repeat the move with your left foot. If you can't come within a few inches of your rear, your quadriceps muscles are overly tight, a condition that can set you up for knee pain.
- **Calves.** Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you, and flex your toes toward your body. If your toes actually point back toward you, your calves are fairly limber. If your toes point straight up or slightly away from you, your calves are tight, which makes ankle sprains more likely.

• **Achilles tendon and ankles.** Holding on to a bed frame, doorjamb, or some other immovable object, gently squat down on your haunches, so your butt is resting against your calves. Keep your weight on the outsides of your feet. If your heels pop up off the floor immediately, or you can stay in the position comfortably for only a few seconds, your Achilles and ankles are fairly inflexible, which also can make you susceptible to ankle injuries. **WARNING:** Don't stand straight up from this position, because it will place too much pressure on your knees. Instead, turn and place one knee on the floor, then push up, using your higher leg for support and your back foot for extra leverage.

## How to Check for a Diastasis

A diastasis is a separation of the two halves of your vertical abdominal muscles, caused by the expansion of your uterus. To see if your muscle has separated, lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet a comfortable distance from your rear end. **If you're in your second or third trimester, place several pillows behind your back, so your head and shoulders are higher than your abdomen.** Place your fingertips an inch or two below your belly button, with your fingers pointing toward your feet. This is the point where the two sections of the abdominal recti muscles normally meet. Lift your head as high as you can. Exhale as you lift. If you feel a ridge more than two finger widths across running from your pubic bone to your belly button along the midsection of your abdomen, you have a diastasis. Still not sure? Press gently on the midsection. The area where your muscles are split apart will feel softer than the muscle tissue on either side. If you have one, you'll need to modify most of your abdominal moves by using a splint, a towel or long piece of cloth, to keep the two halves of your abdominal recti from moving farther apart.