

# Take a run and bump

MAEVE McKILLOP, running coach with Hissy Fit Ltd, was initially unsure about running through pregnancy but a great many baby steps later is an enthusiastic advocate. Photos: Donal Glackin

**When I found out I was pregnant I was thrilled. My husband and I had not long returned from our honeymoon and had planned on getting pregnant but were a little shocked at just how quickly it happened. We had been told it can take 12 months to conceive.**

On our first meeting with the midwife she advised us that the healthier you are the better the chances of conception. Great news for us runners!

Around that time, I was preparing for the Mark Pollock 10k Run in the Dark and decided to do a 16-day detox from caffeine and alcohol (not that I drink much, but I do enjoy a glass of red wine).

I completed the run with a PB and feeling great — and just four days later I learned I was pregnant. Looking back, I believe my fitness coupled with the detox greatly boosted our chances of conceiving.

Being a runner and running coach I knew this would be an amazing yet testing period. There were times when I felt 'Wow! This is new!' and I guess I underestimated pregnancy, but we runners have to take on the challenges and obstacles we face.

I spent some time researching online — 'running through pregnancy' — but found little encouraging information on the subject. What I did find was a mixture of negative sites advising against running and hardcore running sites that I found unrealistic, all of which disheartened me.

I asked doctors and midwives and they all sang from the same hymn sheet: be careful, don't overdo it, listen to your body. All sound advice and of course incredibly important.

They also recommended against intensifying the training I had been used to before getting pregnant —

so, ladies, this is not the time to do your first marathon.

Knowing all this, not wanting to be selfish and needing to continue my job, I felt intuitively that running wasn't going to cause harm. In fact I felt it would only benefit the baby, which of course is every mother's number one priority.

I read many studies on exercise through pregnancy and the consensus was that 'moderate exercise' had been proven to strengthen the baby's heart and lungs and help the mother post-pregnancy not only to lose the weight but also to be healthier and more energetic.

## Finding the balance

But what is 'moderate'? How do we know what is okay? For me, moderate was finding the balance of not pushing past pain yet allowing the heart-rate to rise, running comfortably.

Running through pregnancy also changed my mental approach to running; it became less goal orientated and more about a mindful, holistic practice that both the baby and I could benefit from.

This then inspired me to write an article that could help others stay healthy and fit through pregnancy and enjoy running for as long as they felt comfortable doing so.

So I would like to take you through my journey in the hope it will encourage you to run without fear and quieten the whispers of the sceptical.

## Trimester 1: the challenge begins

Nausea was in full flight and many days I just didn't feel like running. But when it's your livelihood it has to be done. What I would say is listen to your body and if you feel tired and sick — rest!

That said, many women can become overly precious in

pregnancy and of course I understand this, but habits form easily at this time and we can fall into the 'up with the feet and eat' mode.

This can have significant consequences down the line: weight gain, gestational diabetes, back issues.

I am not saying it's easy — I know how hard it can be — but when I got out there and ran I would always feel better after it.

## Spinach for strength

Eating the right foods can be difficult at this point, as you may not feel like eating at all. I tried to eat little and often and would snack on fruit and wholegrain toast on the bad days. When I felt better I loaded up on vegetables, and spinach became a daily staple. Iron is so important in pregnancy, especially for those of us who run.

At the three-month mark, I noticed a shortness of breath. At first this seemed odd considering the baby was still so small, yet it's a crucial time, so I slowed the pace, again finding a balance between overdoing it and becoming a couch potato.

As mentioned, my perspective changed. Instead of always pushing myself to reach better distances and times, I learned to just enjoy the run for itself: a sense of freedom and exploration, the opportunity to de-stress, the feeling of being alive!

On days when running felt too much (the very sick days) I would get out for a walk in the fresh air. The midwives advise that active mothers generally deliver on time and more easily. The less active tend to go over their due date, and let's face it, ladies, 40 weeks is quite enough!

## Trimester 2: the comfortable pace

When I reached month four everything got easier. The nausea eased, the breathing was less laboured, and I felt better equipped than in the previous months.

Around month six I developed something called cuboid syndrome (basically a pain in the foot). Research suggested this was due to the uneven weight distribution of the growing belly.

I had some physio and started to wear a more cushioned shoe, but the extra cushioning didn't help. I was told I would be

out of action for six weeks.

Luckily I had a holiday booked in Spain and each day my husband and I walked barefoot on the sand, and by end of the week the injury had vanished! I returned to my minimalist shoes and was good to go again.

I am an advocate for minimalist footwear and spend a lot of time working on posture and feet. Aligning the body is so important, especially through pregnancy, when there will inevitably be extra pressure on the spine.

Look sideways into a mirror and try to line up the dots from ankle to hip to shoulder. I have done this daily through pregnancy and gone barefoot as much as practicable, and have suffered no back or pelvic pain.

Being a pilates instructor has of course helped. Pilates and running make a perfect marriage.

Meanwhile I had a few events coming up, including the Samsung Night Run and the Terenure 5. I didn't want to put myself under time pressure but I really wanted to run with the Hissy Fit girls (my club in Rathfarnham).

After the Night Run I felt great. It was of course at a gentle pace but I really enjoyed it. Every run boosted my confidence as the baby would kick like crazy after it. I'm convinced he/she is a little runner in the making.

## Trimester 3: the home stretch

I was getting bigger by the week and come the Terenure 5 there was no disguising my belly (not that I wanted to).

I felt a little apprehensive that people

would judge me, that onlookers would be shaking their heads, but it was the complete opposite. I was getting cheers and congratulations, which was incredibly moving for me.

As I finished, the MC shouted, 'Congrats to the mammy coming across the line!' I was thrilled and I really wanted other women to experience the same enjoyment and sense of accomplishment.

In month eight I travelled to Britain to train as a chi running instructor. This was very exciting for me. We spent four days working on running technique, posture and alignment. There is much more to running than pounding pavements, and with chi running you focus on your body and posture, which helps not only with your running but also with life in general.

Having now reached month nine and with just a few weeks to go, I have exchanged running for walking. Our midwife reports that throughout our pregnancy the baby has been practising breathing and hiccupping, signs of a healthy baby, and has been incredibly active.

I believe running has helped me mentally and physically through the pregnancy. You don't have to run 50 miles a week, you don't have to feel scared about running, you don't have to listen to the negative comments, but if you can tune in and trust your body you can enjoy running and make it a mindful, active regime throughout your pregnancy that will bring rewards for both you and your baby.

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## BEAR IN MIND

- Listen to your doctor and midwife
- Supportive sports bras will meet your growing needs through each stage
- Shoes and socks that help accommodate the additional weight and prevent blisters
- Loose, elasticated shorts or bottoms, especially as the belly gets bigger
- A balanced diet of vegetables and fruit as well as the recommended supplements, eg Pregnacare range
- Go barefoot at home as much as possible
- Practise posture and try pregnancy pilates
- Have your partner massage your feet and legs
- Keep active and enjoy the 'run-up' to the big day!

Check out Hissy Fit at [www.hissyfit.ie](http://www.hissyfit.ie) for more information on Running, Pilates & Personal Training