



Exercising After Pregnancy Information Handout

Why Exercise?

Exercise in the post-natal period has many health benefits including:

- Speed up your recovery following pregnancy
- Regain your body shape and lose excess weight
- Tone the muscles affected by pregnancy (including the pelvic floor and deep abdominals)
- Increase cardiovascular fitness and therefore your ability to cope with the demands of being a new mum
- Reduce back ache and pelvic instability
- Improve posture, flexibility and relaxation
- Social interaction
- Clinically proven to reduce the incidence of post-natal depression
- Improved self confidence

How soon can I start exercising?

It is important that you give your body the chance to recover following pregnancy/labor. It takes at least 6 to 12 months before you can realistically regain your pre-pregnancy body (including pelvic strength and normal hormones).

You can begin gentle exercise as soon as comfortable after giving birth (ie walking, pelvic floor exercises, abdominal bracing).

By six weeks you can start to increase your exercise levels. However you should wait at least 3 months (preferably 4 months) before starting high impact exercise such as running or aerobics. Prior to this, the pelvic floor is unlikely to be strong enough to sustain the load of high impact exercise. If you overload a weak pelvic floor it can lead to problems of incontinence and prolapse down the track.

What about abdominal and pelvic floor exercises?

The pelvic floor and abdominal muscles are obviously affected by pregnancy (whether you have a vaginal delivery or caesarian). It is important that you regain strength and tone in these muscles as they are essential for all activity.

Often women will experience a split of their abdominal muscles during pregnancy or labor. When this occurs you should not start abdominal exercises such as crunches or sit-ups until the split has stabilized. You can however begin core abdominal exercises such as pilates, this form of exercise will help support the split muscle, provide strength to your back and pelvis and will tone up that post-preggie tummy.

Pelvic floor exercises can be resumed as soon as comfortable following birth. It will take time to regain endurance and strength in these muscles. They are affected by the hormone relaxin which will leave them weak following pregnancy. Do your pelvic floor exercises for short periods regularly throughout the day. If you suffer from symptoms such as urinary leakage, dribbling or urgency, or if you experience a heavy or dragging sensation you should consult a womens health physiotherapist.

Other important factors

- Studies have shown that participating in vigorous or regular exercise will have no adverse effect on a mother's ability to breastfeed. However it is important that you maintain good fluid intake when you exercise.
- Ensure that you warm up, cool down and stretch as per any exercise participation. Start your exercise gently and gradually build intensity and frequency as comfortable. If you are experiencing pain while exercising, cease the activity and consult a physiotherapist or medical practitioner before continuing.
- Wear a supportive bra, good trainers and appropriate clothing.
- Eat regular meals to ensure that you are maintaining the dietary needs of breastfeeding, especially nutrient dense food (fruit, vegetables, lean meat, cereals) and at least four serves of calcium a day.



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See website for details on MummyFit classes