

EXERCISES, POSTPARTUM



BASIC INFORMATION

DEFINITION

- Following childbirth, a woman who gained an average amount of weight (25-35 pounds) during pregnancy can expect to regain her prepregnancy figure and weight in about 6 to 12 weeks. Exercising will help tighten the pelvic floor muscles (Kegel exercises), the abdominal muscles and strengthen the back muscles. Exercising for as little as 10 minutes a day and gradually increasing as time permits will help get you back into shape. A daily routine or a minimum of three times a week exercise program is better than an intermittent activity (e.g., just on weekends). If the birth was cesarean, consult with the obstetric provider about when to begin an exercise program.
- Recovery time from childbirth will vary among women depending on prepregnancy fitness condition, amount of weight gained, how much the abdominal wall expanded and how much time and effort a woman is willing to give to improving her body. Additional factors include diet, amount of rest obtained and types of activities involved in.
- Crash dieting is never recommended to lose excess pregnancy weight, even if you are not breast-feeding. It can lead to excessive tiredness, general ill health and even depression. Eating sensibly with emphasis on nutrition will help you return to the peak of fitness.
- Plan an exercise program that includes aerobic activity (walking, biking, swimming, or others where you use special exercise equipment) along with specific exercises designed to tighten the pelvic floor muscles and abdominal muscles that are loose and soft. Discuss your specific exercise program with the obstetric provider.

ADVANTAGES OF EXERCISING

- Will help flatten the abdomen and tighten the perineum. Promotes healing of uterine, abdominal and pelvic muscles that were involved in pregnancy and childbirth.
- Can help avoid stress incontinence (leakage of urine).
- Helps avoid a dropping (prolapse) of pelvic organs.
- Helps return loosened joints to normal.
- Reduces the risk of backache and edema (excess fluid) in the legs and feet.
- Provides an outlet for stress and lessens the likelihood of postpartum blues or depression.
- A fitness program will condition and tone your body.

EXERCISE SUGGESTIONS

- Any exercise program should be resumed gradually based on a woman's physical capability. Keep routines brief and frequent rather than one long session.
- Begin a mild exercise program almost immediately following childbirth by performing pelvic tightening exercises (Kegel exercises) in bed. Continue to do these exercises daily. They can be done almost anywhere you are sitting or standing.
- At home, start each exercise program with a warm-up and stretching.
- Abdominal exercises usually consist of crunches (curl-ups). Lie on a firm surface with legs bent and feet flat on the floor. Place hands behind head, elbows to the side and lift head and shoulders a few inches off the floor. You will feel a tightening of the abdominal muscles. Do several, then rest a few seconds and do several more.
- Pelvic tilts can be combined with crunches or done alone. In the same position for crunches, press your back into the floor and lift the pelvis a few inches off the floor and then release. Do several, then rest a few seconds and do several more.
- One of the best options for postpartum fitness is to join an exercise class specifically designed for new mothers. It will not only concentrate on the muscle groups that need strengthening, but will put you in contact with other new mothers going through the same emotional and physical changes as you are.

RESUMING PREPREGNANCY EXERCISE ROUTINE

- It is usually recommended to wait until after your first postpartum check-up (usually 4 to 6 weeks following delivery) to resume a vigorous exercise or fitness routine. Though this medical visit is considered the conclusion of your pregnancy, your body still has physical adjustments to make.
- Discuss your exercise or fitness plan with your obstetric provider. It may involve running, jogging, bicycling, swimming or other strenuous activities. When you resume the activity, do so gradually and build up to your prepregnancy capability.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member wants additional information about postpartum exercises.