

Postpartum Exercise: What's Safe? What's Effective?

by

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Important notes....

- Three factors affect postpartum exercise:
 - pregnancy fitness level
 - birth process and recovery
 - mom and baby adaptation
- If you are a regular exerciser you can return gradually.
- If you are a beginner, limit your activity until you get clearance.
- Avoid strenuous activity until the lochia is pretty much over.
- Warning Signs:
 - bleeding or increased discharge the next day after activity – slow down
 - hot spot on leg; deep pain in leg; fever or other signs of infection - contact HCP
- Rest in Constructive Rest Position (CRP) and learn to do the hiss/compress!



CRP

Safe and effective activity for the first 6 weeks...

√ = okay for beginning exercisers

I. The First Few Days to Week 2

- Hiss/compress – exhale and suck in the transverse abdominal. √
- Head Lifts – only when client can maintain transverse in contraction. √
- Curl ups – once head lifts are controlled. √
- Walking √
- Kegels √
- Slow, deep breathing. √

II. Weeks 2 to 4

Add:

- Upper body strength exercises – chest, back, shoulders, arms.
- Hip and leg strength exercises – fitness squats, extensors (gluteals), ab- and adductors.
- Ankle rotations. √
- Stretching or yoga poses, if comfortable. √
- Jogging, if comfortable.

NOTE: With cesarean, wait a couple of weeks to start these abdominal exercises... BUT, do the Constructive Rest Position (see above). √

III. Weeks 4 to 6

Add:

- Join a mom & baby exercise group with a certified postnatal fitness instructor. ✓
- Other options?

The Evidence for Exercise Following Birth

Postpartum aerobic exercise has been found to improve cardiovascular fitness, contribute to weight loss, and prevent long-term weight retention.¹ It has been demonstrated that a single bout of exercise reduced depression, state anxiety and total mood disturbance, and increased vigour in postpartum mothers.² Additional studies have shown that vigorous exercise prior to 6 weeks postpartum may facilitate postpartum adaptation³ and may help prevent or manage postnatal depression.⁴

Specific strength exercises to reduce low back pain have been shown effective in the postpartum period. The intervention was given 3 times per week for 30-60 minutes, training the muscles that support the pelvic girdle including the transverse abdominals, gluteus maximus, latisimus dorsi, oblique abdominals, and others. [5] The Yale Pre/Postnatal Back Care Video can be viewed at http://streaming.yale.edu/cmi2/orator/pregnancy/pregnancy_video.html. Breastfeeding moms can exercise moderately without diminishing the amount of vital fatty acids⁶ or other factors⁷ in their breast milk.

In general, better maternal well-being was found among subjects maintaining or increasing Sport/Exercise (SE) compared to no SE or decreased SE prepregnancy to postpartum. Support from partner/husband, family, and friends were significant factors in maintaining or increasing SE.⁸ Positive support messages about exercise from Health Care Providers is effective in helping improve physical health, according to a review published in the April 15, 2008 issue of the *American Family Physician*.⁹

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