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## Postnatal exercise

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## Summary

- Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program.
- Don't be too hard on yourself if your exercise plans go awry – you'll get more time to yourself as your baby settles into a predictable routine.

Regular exercise has numerous health benefits, all of which apply equally to the new mother as at any other stage of life. These benefits include assistance with weight loss, increased aerobic fitness, social interaction and psychological wellbeing. Exercise after giving birth can also hasten recovery, and assist with muscle strength and toning.

**Always** consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program. Whether or not you are ready to exercise depends on individual factors. For instance, you may be advised to wait until your six-week postnatal check-up. In other cases, especially if you were exercising regularly throughout your pregnancy, you may be able to return to exercise sooner than that – perhaps within the first week or two.

## The benefits of postnatal exercise

Exercising after you have your baby can improve your physical and mental wellbeing. It can:

- Help restore muscle strength and firm up your body
- Make you less tired because it raises your energy level and improves your sense of wellbeing
- Promote weight loss
- Improve your cardiovascular fitness and restore muscle strength
- Condition your abdominal muscles
- Improve your mood, relieve stress and help prevent postpartum depression.

## When to start postnatal exercises

Gentle exercise (such as walking) can generally be started as soon as comfortable after giving birth. Start when you feel up to it. Some women will feel able to start exercising early. Talk with your doctor about when is a good time for you to restart an exercise program.

Six weeks after giving birth, most of the changes that occur during pregnancy will have returned to normal. If you had a caesarean birth, a difficult birth, or complications, it may take a little longer to feel ready to start exercising. If you did not exercise during pregnancy, start with easy exercises and slowly build up to harder ones.

Keep in mind your lower back and core abdominal muscles are weaker than they used to be. Your ligaments and joints are also more supple and pliable, so it is easier to injure yourself by stretching or twisting too much. Avoid any high-impact exercises or sports that require rapid direction changes.

## Breastfeeding and exercise

Studies have shown that vigorous or regular exercise does not have adverse effects on a mother's ability to successfully breastfeed as long as fluid and caloric intake are maintained. Some research, however, suggests that high-intensity physical activity can cause lactic acid to accumulate in breast milk and produce a sour taste a baby might not like. If you're breastfeeding, you can prevent this potential problem by sticking to low- to moderate-intensity physical activity and drinking plenty of fluids during and after your workout.

## Pelvic floor

The pelvic floor may be adversely affected by pregnancy and childbirth. Most women are taught pelvic floor exercises during pregnancy and these are important to learn correctly and can be resumed immediately after giving birth.

## Creating time for postnatal exercise

When you're caring for a newborn, finding time for physical activity can be challenging. Some days you may simply feel too tired for a full workout. But that doesn't mean that you should put physical activity on the back burner. Do the best you can. Suggestions include:

- Seek the support of your partner, family and friends. Exercise with a friend to stay motivated.
- Walking is a good way to get back in shape – all you need is a pair of comfortable shoes. It is free, and you can do it almost any place or time. You can also take your baby along.

- Include your baby, lying next to you on the floor, while you do abdominal exercises.
- Exercising 10 minutes at a time is fine. We know 150 minutes each week (as per *National Physical Activity Guidelines*) sounds like a lot of time, but you don't have to do it all at once. Not only is it best to spread your activity out during the week, but you can break it up into smaller chunks of time during the day.
- Don't be too hard on yourself if your exercise plans go awry. Just do the best you can, and remember – you will get more time to yourself as your baby settles into a predictable routine.
- Tummy and pelvic floor exercises can be done while you're doing other tasks, either sitting or standing. To help you remember, try performing the exercises whenever you do certain things, such as breastfeeding or driving the car. (For details on tummy and pelvic floor exercises, refer to the Better Health Channel article 'Postnatal exercise – sample workout').
- Walk your baby in the pram rather than use the car for short trips.
- Consider building up a home library of exercise dvds. It might be a good idea to include a few tapes that offer shorter workouts too (such as 15 or 30 minutes), just so you don't have to always find a full hour or more to exercise.

## General exercise safety suggestions

Be guided by your doctor or midwife, but general suggestions include:

- Wear an appropriate bra that offers good support. Don't rely on your pre-pregnancy sports bra because your back and cup size are likely to have changed. Get measured for a new one.
- Your exercises should not hurt. If you experience pain or any other unexplained symptoms stop the exercise and consult your doctor if necessary.

## Types of postnatal exercises

Recommended postnatal exercise includes:

- Brisk walking
- Swimming
- Aqua aerobics
- Yoga
- Pilates
- Low impact aerobic workouts
- Light weight training
- Cycling.

See your doctor or midwife for further recommendations and cautions.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your midwife
- Physiotherapist

## Things to remember

- Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program.
- Don't be too hard on yourself if your exercise plans go awry – you'll get more time to yourself as your baby settles into a predictable routine.

### References

- *Improving your recovery after birth – physiotherapy advice*, Royal Women's Hospital. [More information here.](#)
- *Labour and delivery, postpartum care*, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. [More information here.](#)
- *Postnatal exercises for the first six weeks*, Baby Centre UK. [More information here.](#)

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### Pregnancy and birth basics

- [Childbirth - pain relief options](#)

[Understanding your pain relief options can help you cope better with the pain of childbirth...](#)

- [Pregnancy – labour](#)

[Labour is divided into three stages. The first stage is dilation of the cervix from 0 to 10 cm, the second stage is birth of the baby, and the third stage is delivery of the placenta. Labour typically...](#)

- [Pregnancy - premature labour](#)

[Sometimes, babies arrive early. It's important to recognise premature labour, in case you and your baby need medical care...](#)

- [Contraception after giving birth](#)

[After having a baby, you need to choose an effective method of contraception if you don't want to have another baby straight away...](#)

- [If you want to get pregnant, timing is everything](#)

[If you are trying for a baby, to increase your chances of conceiving, it helps to know when you are at your most fertile, and when is the best time to have sex...](#)

- [Pregnancy testing](#)

[Sometimes, a home pregnancy test may be positive when a woman isn't pregnant...](#)

- [Folate for pregnant women](#)

[Even women who aren't planning to have a baby should increase their folate intake in case of unplanned pregnancy...](#)

- [Pregnancy - unplanned](#)

[When a woman does not want to become a parent, her pregnancy options may include abortion or adoption...](#)

- [Contraception - emergency contraception](#)

[It is best to take emergency contraception as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of having unprotected sex, but it still works well within 96 hours \(four days\)...](#)

#### **Stages of pregnancy**

- [Baby due date](#)

[Pregnancy is calculated from the first day of your last period, not from the date of conception...](#)

- [Pregnancy - week by week](#)

[Pregnancy is counted as 40 weeks, starting from the first day of the mother's last menstrual period...](#)

- [Pregnancy - signs and symptoms](#)

[All women experience pregnancy differently, and you will experience different symptoms at different stages of your pregnancy...](#)

- [Planning for labour and birth](#)

[Some of the signs and symptoms of going into labour may include period-like cramps, backache, diarrhoea and contractions...](#)

- [Conceiving a baby](#)

[The odds of a young fertile couple conceiving by having sexual intercourse around the time of ovulation \(the release of the egg from the ovary\) are approximately one in five every month. Around nine...](#)

- [Pregnancy stages and changes](#)

[It's helpful to have an idea of how your body may react to the different stages of pregnancy. It also helps to know how pregnancy may affect your emotions and feelings...](#)

#### **Fertility issues and options**

- [Adoption](#)

[Adoption can give a secure family life to children who can't live with their birth family...](#)

- [Surrogacy](#)

[Surrogacy is a form of assisted reproductive treatment \(ART\) in which a woman carries a child within her uterus on behalf of another person or couple...](#)

- [If you want to get pregnant, timing is everything](#)

[If you are trying for a baby, to increase your chances of conceiving, it helps to know when you are at your most fertile, and when is the best time to have sex...](#)

- [Abortion](#)

[All women should have access to accurate information about abortion so they can make their own informed decisions...](#)

- [Age and fertility](#)

[Age affects the fertility of both men and women, and is the single biggest factor affecting a woman's chance to conceive and have a healthy baby...](#)

- [Infertility in men](#)

[A couple isn't suspected of fertility problems until they have tried and failed to conceive for one year...](#)

- [Infertility in women](#)

[The odds of a young fertile couple conceiving by having sexual intercourse around the time of ovulation are approximately one in five every month...](#)

- [Weight, fertility and pregnancy health](#)

[Compared with women in the healthy weight range, women who are carrying extra weight are less likely to conceive...](#)

### **Keeping healthy during pregnancy**

- [Pregnancy - morning sickness](#)

[Morning sickness is typically at its worst early in the day but it can strike at any point during the day or night...](#)

- [Postnatal exercise - sample workout](#)

[Make sure your abdominal muscles have healed before you do any vigorous tummy exercises, such as crunches...](#)

- [Healthy eating during pregnancy - tucker talk tips](#)

[Some foods should be avoided during pregnancy as they carry bacteria that could harm your unborn baby...](#)

- [Postnatal exercise](#)

[Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program...](#)

- [Pregnancy and your mental health](#)

[Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn't stop when the baby...](#)

- [Tests, scans and checks - pregnancy and labour](#)

[Tests can confirm your pregnancy and also monitor your baby's development in the womb...](#)

- [Alcohol and pregnancy](#)

[There's no safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. It's safest to not drink at all during pregnancy, when trying to conceive, and while breastfeeding...](#)

- [Pregnancy and smoking](#)

[Smoking while pregnant exposes a woman and her unborn child to an increased risk of health problems...](#)

- [Immunisation and pregnancy](#)

[Immunisation can protect a woman and her unborn baby against many infectious diseases...](#)

- [Folate for pregnant women](#)

[Even women who aren't planning to have a baby should increase their folate intake in case of unplanned pregnancy...](#)

- [Pregnancy and exercise](#)

[Unless you have complications, you should be able to exercise throughout your pregnancy...](#)

- [Pelvic floor](#)

[Pelvic floor exercises are designed to improve muscle tone and prevent the need for corrective surgery...](#)

- [Pregnancy and diet](#)

[Good nutrition during pregnancy can help to keep you and your developing baby healthy...](#)

- [Pregnancy and travel](#)

[Travelling to developing nations is not encouraged during pregnancy, due to the risk of disease and the standard of medical facilities...](#)

- [Food poisoning - listeria](#)

[Listeria infection is uncommon but very dangerous for the elderly, people whose immune systems are not working properly and pregnant women and their unborn babies...](#)

### **Health concerns during pregnancy**

- [Miscarriage and Stillbirth - Coming to terms \(video\)](#)

- [Pregnancy - bleeding problems](#)  
[Bleeding from the vagina in early pregnancy happens in almost one in four pregnancies...](#)
- [Newborn bloodspot screening \(video\)](#)  
[Every newborn baby in Australia is offered a newborn bloodspot screening test to identify those at risk for rare, but serious, medical conditions including PKU, hypothyroidism and cystic fibrosis...](#)
- [Placenta previa](#)  
[Placenta previa means the placenta has implanted at the bottom of the uterus, over the cervix or close by...](#)
- [Placental abruption](#)  
[Placental abruption means the placenta has detached from the wall of the uterus, starving the baby of oxygen and nutrients...](#)
- [Pregnancy - pre-eclampsia](#)  
[There is no evidence that pre-eclampsia is caused by emotional stress, working too hard or not getting enough rest...](#)
- [Lupus and pregnancy](#)  
[Lupus can be controlled with medications, so the majority of affected women are able to have children...](#)
- [HIV and women – having children](#)  
[Women living with human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\), or women whose partner is HIV-positive, may wish to have children but feel concerned about the risk of transmission of the virus to themselves \(if...](#)
- [Alcohol and pregnancy](#)  
[There's no safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. It's safest to not drink at all during pregnancy, when trying to conceive, and while breastfeeding...](#)
- [Pregnancy and smoking](#)  
[Smoking while pregnant exposes a woman and her unborn child to an increased risk of health problems...](#)
- [Pregnancy - obstetric emergencies](#)  
[An obstetric emergency may arise when a woman is pregnant, or during her delivery. In this case, extra care is needed. A woman may need a lot of tests and treatments, and extended hospital stays. She...](#)
- [Postnatal depression \(PND\)](#)  
[Postnatal depression can happen either a few days or weeks after the birth, with a slow or sudden onset...](#)
- [Molar pregnancy](#)  
[Most molar pregnancies are diagnosed when bleeding early in pregnancy prompts an ultrasound scan...](#)
- [Miscarriage](#)  
[A range of feelings is normal after a miscarriage, and they often linger for some time...](#)
- [Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder \(FASD\)](#)  
[The World Health Organization recommends that pregnant women should avoid alcohol...](#)
- [Asthma - pregnancy and breastfeeding](#)  
[Pregnant women with asthma need to continue to take their asthma medication as it is important to the health of both mother and baby that the mother's asthma is well managed...](#)
- [Pregnancy and diet](#)  
[Good nutrition during pregnancy can help to keep you and your developing baby healthy...](#)
- [Birth defects explained](#)  
[The cause of birth defects is often unknown, speak to your GP if you are at increased risk of having a baby with a congenital anomaly...](#)
- [Ectopic pregnancy](#)  
[Ectopic pregnancy is caused by a fertilised egg not being able to move through the fallopian tube...](#)
- [Diabetes - gestational](#)  
[Gestational diabetes is diabetes that occurs during pregnancy and usually disappears when the pregnancy is over...](#)

## Preparing for birth

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- [Pregnancy - care choices](#)

[It's very important for you and your baby to be looked after from the start of your pregnancy until after the birth of your baby...](#)

- [Pregnancy – labour](#)

[Labour is divided into three stages. The first stage is dilation of the cervix from 0 to 10 cm, the second stage is birth of the baby, and the third stage is delivery of the placenta. Labour typically...](#)

- [Pregnancy - premature labour](#)

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[Packing for hospital is an exciting part of preparing for the birth of your baby...](#)

- [Planning for labour and birth](#)

[Some of the signs and symptoms of going into labour may include period-like cramps, backache, diarrhoea and contractions...](#)

- [Twins - identical and fraternal](#)

[Multiple births are more common due to the advancing average age of mothers and the rise in assisted reproductive techniques...](#)

### Preparing for a newborn

- [Breastfeeding - the first days](#)

[Let your baby feed as much as they want in the first few days to help establish good breastfeeding patterns...](#)

- [Breastfeeding - when to start](#)

[Breastfeeding within the first hour after birth allows your baby to behave instinctively and breastfeed with little intervention...](#)

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[With low levels of vitamin K, some babies can have severe bleeding into the brain, causing significant brain damage...](#)

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- [Baby furniture - safety tips](#)

[Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs close supervision...](#)

- [Newborn bloodspot screening](#)

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- [No Jab No Play](#)

No Jab No Play – from 1 January 2016, all parents/guardians seeking to enrol their child at an early childhood service in Victoria must provide evidence that the child is fully immunised for their age...

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- [Postpartum exercise: Is your body ready?](#)

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