

Post Partum Exercise Guidelines

The first 6 weeks:

Many of the body/hormonal/postural changes that occur during pregnancy linger on several weeks after delivery. Because of this and the added fatigue of newborn care you need to gradually return to your regular exercise routine. To help this transition back to your "old self" use the same care when moving as you did when you were pregnant.

Contract your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles when lifting to help protect your low back as well as to begin to re-strengthen these areas. (Do this by gently tightening the vaginal and rectal muscles as if to hold in urine and gas while also pulling in abdominal muscles as if to zip up tight jeans. Breathe normally as you do this)

Try to do 10 pelvic floor contractions (squeeze the vaginal rectal muscles as if to hold in urine and gas) holding 5-10 counts while feeding your baby. Pelvic floor exercise in the immediate postpartum period helps re-strengthen these muscles, supports the spine/pelvic girdle and may help prevent urinary incontinence.)

Resume walking, increasing the length of time in 15 minute increments. Gradually increase your speed to brisk walking as your energy level returns.

Before beginning abdominal exercise check to see that you do not have a separation of your abdominal muscles known as a diastasis recti. Check this by lying on your back with knees bent and feet on flat on the bed. Put your fingers about a hand width above and below belly button. Now lift your head to just clear the bed. If the abdominal muscles gap more than 2 finger widths apart check with your ob/gyn provider before beginning abdominal muscle exercise.

The next 6-12 weeks

At 6 weeks post partum you can start to resume your regular exercise routines. Because you are still recovering from delivery you should exercise for less time and at a lower intensity than pre-pregnancy and gradually increase to your regular routine. The following exercise will help you re-strengthen the lower abdominals

1) One leg heel slide: Lie on your back with knees bent. Contract pelvic floor and abdominal muscles as you slowly slide one heel away from your body until your leg is straight. Relax. Contract muscles again as you slide your heel back to the start position. Begin with 10 repetitions on each side and work to 20-30 repetitions.

2) Single leg fall out: Lie on your back with knees bent, hip width apart and feet flat on floor. Breathe in, as you breathe out, contract your pelvic floor muscles and let one leg fall out to the side. Relax. Do a pelvic floor contraction and bring leg back to starting position. Begin with 10 repetitions on each leg and work to 20. When you can do 20 with each leg begin to do both legs together. Start with 10 and work to 20.

3) On hands and knees: On your bed get into a hands and knees position so that you are square: hands under shoulders and knees below hips. Maintain the normal curve of your low back. Breathe in and as you breathe out contract your pelvic floor muscles and gently pull abdominal muscles toward spine. Begin with 10 repetitions holding 5 seconds, work to 2 sets of 10 repetitions, holding 10 seconds.

