

Physical activity for new mums



Regular physical activity provides health benefits for everyone, and particularly for new mums by:

- Helping your body recover faster from pregnancy and childbirth
- Improving your fitness, muscle strength and flexibility to manage all that comes with motherhood
- Helping you feel better about yourself – no matter what size or shape you are
- Giving you more energy to cope with your new lifestyle as a mother
- Lowering stress
- Increasing the chances that your new baby will adopt an active lifestyle!

Consult your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal physical activity

You might be advised to wait until your six-week postnatal check-up before doing anything much more than regular walking; though if you were regularly physically active during your pregnancy, it could be sooner.

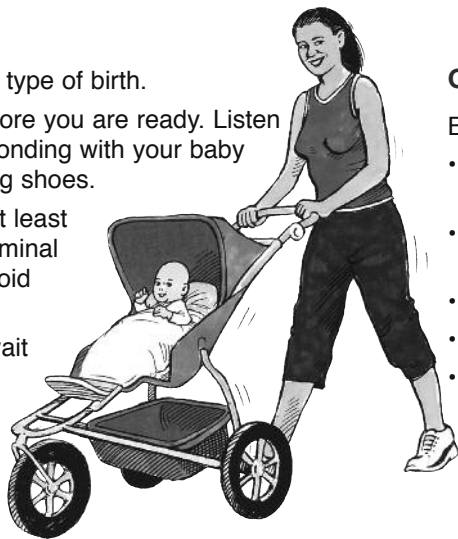
Your body shape

Being a first-time mother, you will notice your body looks quite different after giving birth. Your pregnant belly was full, round and taut but now has lost its muscle tone. This is completely normal and your uterus will gradually contract which helps flatten your tummy. Postnatal physical activity can further help your tummy return to its pre-pregnancy shape, which can take a few months.

Take time to recover first

Childbirth places strain on the body, regardless of the type of birth.

- Don't feel pressured to be physically active before you are ready. Listen to your body. For the first month, resting and bonding with your baby are more important than putting on your running shoes.
- Your ligaments and joints will be softened for at least three months following the birth and your abdominal muscles have stretched so it is important to avoid vigorous workouts.
- If you have had an episiotomy – you need to wait until you have healed.
- If you had a caesarean birth you will need to wait the full six weeks before commencing physical activity and heavy lifting.



Types of physical activity

Start gently and progress to regular exercise as you feel ready. Walking is a great way to start, so take your baby for a walk as often as possible and build up your walking pace. Later on consider options such as swimming, aqua aerobics, yoga, pilates, low impact aerobic workouts, light weight training or cycling.

Creating time for physical activity

Your lifestyle has been very different since the birth of your baby. Some ideas for regular physical activity include:

- Tummy and pelvic floor exercises can be done while you're doing other tasks, either sitting or standing. Try them whenever you do certain things, such as breastfeeding, talking on the phone, preparing meals and having a shower
- Walk your baby in the pram rather than use the car for short trips
- If you can't walk close to where you live, drive to the shopping centre and walk around the shops. You can park your car further away from the entrance to add more steps to your day
- Work in the garden with your baby nearby in the pram
- Borrow some physical activity videotapes/DVDs from the library. It might be a good idea to get shorter workouts at first such as 15 or 30 minutes
- Accept offers of babysitting! You can use this time to be active (unless you need sleep more than anything else). Your partner, a friend or a relative might help out regularly with this.

General physical activity safety suggestions

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

- Begin slowly – try to be active on most days of the week – even for 10 minutes at a time and gradually increase
- If you feel breathless or light-headed while being active, slow down or stop. You should not feel any pain or experience any heavy vaginal bleeding
- Make sure you drink plenty of water and also get lots of rest
- Don't do any physical activity that hurt your breasts, wear a supportive bra if you can
- Try to do physical activity after breastfeeding, rather than before when your breasts are full and heavy
- Be careful when you commence activities like high-impact aerobics, running or netball that require sudden changes in direction as you could damage weakened ligaments and joints.