
6 ways to get your body back after giving birth

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You've just spent nearly 40 weeks growing a human, carefully watching what you eat and how much you weigh. Now that you've given birth, you might be anxious to get the extra pounds off and, more importantly, focus on getting your body back in shape. So how can this be done in a safe way, and what's the best way to do it?

The first step to take is to make sure that your goals are realistic. No one should ever base their weight-loss plan or exercise regimen off of a celebrity who swears she lost all her baby weight in just 6 weeks! This is not realistic or healthy, and it can set you up for some pretty big disappointment.

Make sure that the reasons you want to start exercising are the *right* reasons: wanting to be healthy, have more energy, keep postpartum depression at bay (yes, exercise can help with this!), and get some time to yourself. You should not be getting on a treadmill right after having a baby because your partner wants you to get back into your pre-baby clothes or because you are worried other moms are judging you.

When it comes to losing the baby weight, there are a few ways to make this easier. Making good food choices, hydrating, and consuming the right amount of calories are all important to take into consideration. Breastfeeding is another way to help the pounds fall off, and yes, you *can* exercise without damaging your milk supply.

As for exercising, it's important to remember before you begin that giving birth changes your body, so don't be so hard on yourself before you start. Make sure that whatever exercises you do, you've gotten the all-clear from your doctor or midwife—this usually happens at your 6-week postpartum visit. And if at any time you are doing these exercises you notice intense pain, increased bleeding, or don't feel right, stop and check in with your medical provider to make sure nothing serious is wrong.

Pregnancy can leave you with stretched abdominal muscles and a weakened pelvic floor, so exercises that target these areas are great. Also, if you've noticed any neck or back pain (either from pushing for hours or maybe because you spend so much time carrying your newborn or nursing), certain exercises can relieve these symptoms too. Here are a few good exercises to start with:

1. Walking. Walking is a great way to ease back into activity, and by eventually adding more distance and faster speeds, you can get a good workout from this alone. You can even bring your baby along or use this as a nice way to meet new moms.

2. Yoga. Yoga can be a wonderful way to strengthen your core muscles and pelvic floor, and finding a class that provides the intensity level you need is often not hard. Learning how to do mindful breathing and how to focus can also be nice benefits for new moms who spend so much time caring for others!

3. Kegel exercises. Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles can definitely help if you've got any postpartum urine leakage, and **Kegel's are great for this.** Confused? Ask your OB/GYN or midwife to assess if you are doing them correctly at your postpartum visit.

4. Cardio classes. The benefit of classes is that you get to mix exercising with socializing, and the schedule can help hold you accountable. Classes that mix cardio, dance, and abdominal work are all great because they hit multiple muscle groups and get your heart rate up.

5. Swimming. Another great way to ease back into activity is to swim laps at your own pace. The extra buoyancy in the water can help take any stress off your back or other joints.

6. Use your baby. This might sound funny, but your baby makes a great exercise tool! Do squats while holding your little one, or try pelvic tilts with the baby on your tummy. Lots of "mommy and me" exercise classes do exactly this and are a great way to spend time with your little one while getting in shape and making new mom friends!

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Takeaways

- Postpartum exercise can help your body get back in shape, but be realistic about your goals.
- Pick exercises that sound fun to you and will target areas that you are concerned with.
- Be sure to get the all-clear from your doctor or midwife before starting an exercise program postpartum.
- If at any time you are doing these exercises you notice intense pain, increased bleeding, or don't feel right, stop and check in with your medical provider.