

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy in Postnatal Care – Returning to Exercise



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Returning to Exercise Postnatally

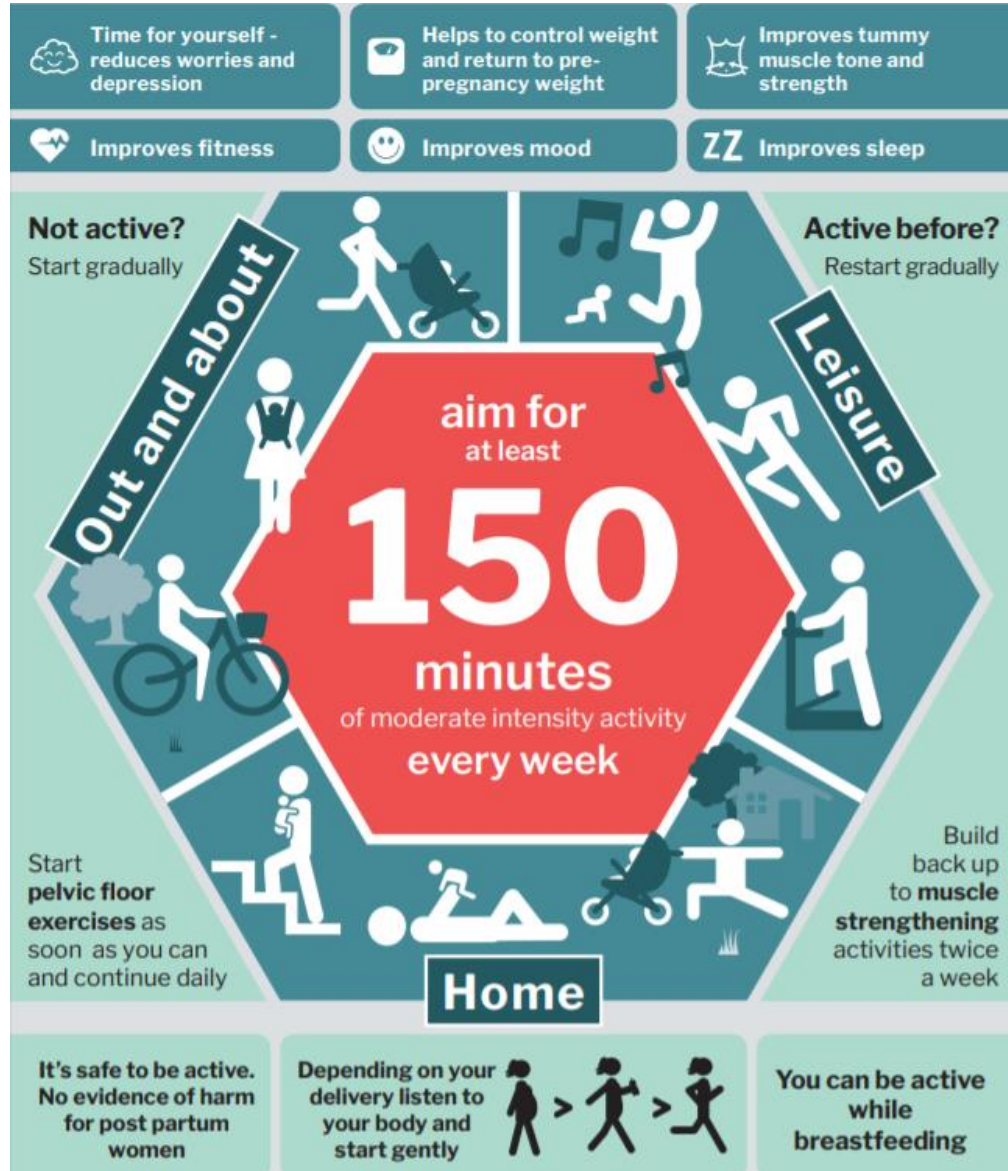
- You may not feel like exercising for a while after having your baby. When you do feel ready, it is a good idea to start off gently and build up gradually
- Start strengthening your core by working on the abdominal and pelvic floor exercises detailed earlier in the presentation
- Try Pilates or yoga to build up your strength progressively
- Avoid high impact exercise such as running or jumping for at least 3 months after having your baby and when you do return to this, do it gradually
 - For low impact alternatives, try cycling, spinning, brisk walking or incline walking on a treadmill to start building your cardiovascular fitness back up
 - When you feel ready to progress to running, try interval training – alternate brisk walking with bursts of light jogging
 - If you attend an exercise class, try swapping high impact jumps for squats or lunges to start with



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Physical Activity After Childbirth

























- The chart on the left shows the exercise recommendations after having your baby (from birth to 12 months)
(UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines 2019)



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Exercise Progression in the Postnatal Runner

Weeks Postnatal	Examples of Exercise Progression				
Weeks 0-2	 Pelvic floor muscle strength & endurance	 Basic core exercises e.g. pelvic tilt	 Walking for Cardiovascular exercise		
Weeks 2-4	 Progress walking, pelvic floor muscle/core rehab				Introduce squats, lunges & bridging in line with day-to-day requirements
Weeks 4-6	 Low impact exercise - static cycling	 Low impact - cross trainer Individualise according to postnatal recovery, mode of delivery, perineal trauma & saddle comfort			
Weeks 6-8	 Scar mobilisation	 Power walking	 Increase low impact exercise	 Add dead lift	 Add resistance to lower limb & core
Weeks 8-12	 Introduce swimming	 Dependent if lochia stopped & wound healing satisfactory	 Spinning if comfortable sitting on a spinning saddle		
Week 12 & Beyond	 Graded return to running	 Goal specific	 Consider running coach	 Consider risk factors e.g. obesity	 Modify according to signs & symptoms

These guidelines show some suggestions for how to gradually build up your strength and cardiovascular fitness postnatally with the aim of returning to running/high impact exercise

Returning to Exercise | Realistic Goals

- If you experience bladder leakage, vaginal heaviness or prolapse symptoms when you exercise postnatally, try to find types of activity that don't cause or increase your symptoms
- Get to work on your pelvic floor and abdominal exercises
- Then gradually build up what other exercise you are doing as your symptoms improve
- It can take a while for your pelvic floor muscles to strengthen enough to return to your pre-baby level of fitness – If bladder leakage is an ongoing problem, there are vaginal devices that may reduce leakage during exercise
 - Speak to a pelvic health physiotherapist for information about these



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Further advice

- [Advice & Guidance for Exercise in the Childbearing Years | POGP \(thepogp.co.uk\)](http://thepogp.co.uk)