

Foundations for early Postnatal Recovery 0-6 weeks

Hi Mumma and congratulations on the arrival of your little bundle(s) of joy!

Well done you, pregnancy and birth is a massive workout in itself right!? Pregnancy is up to nine months of amazing changes your body goes through to nurture your growing baby, then birth, however it happened for you....wow, yet another amazing challenge for your body!

Both pregnancy and birth must be recognised as HUGE and you need to give your body a little ...no, a lot of grace, rest, recovery and restoration. It is probably up there as one of; if not the most amazing thing our body can do but yet the most challenging also. Society often expects us to just bounce back and get on with daily life, caring for a newborn plus our normal chores which often includes caring for other children too all while we rest, recovery and restore our body to optimal function. Often postnatal care focuses on your newborn and mothers are left to recover on their own. However, remember you are deserving of self-care first, the ability to take of others and meet daily demands is an added bonus of this. xx

I have developed my programs for mothers to help you *re-energise you!*

So, to start you off I've got some simple and gentle tips, movements and exercise that are achievable to help you kick start your recovery. I know you are tired and busy, but including some *gentle* movement and exercise into your daily routine (unless contra-indicated) will only make you feel better and have some amazing benefits, including; reduce aches and pains, improve posture through improved core and pelvic floor function, improve recovery from pregnancy and birth and improve strength and health.

Yes you can 'exercise' before six weeks postpartum but your exercise should initially be gentle and progressive like the rest of this program to gradually build your strength and fitness back up. However, you do also need to ensure you allow sufficient time to adjust to life as a new mum, allow time for your body to heal and recover in those first few weeks, allow yourself to rest as much as possible and allow time for learning, there is lots to learn as a new mum! Don't put too much pressure on yourself.

If you are less than six weeks postpartum and you are feeling good, it is probably ok to start some GENTLE mobility and functional movements, I do recommend checking with your midwife/GP/obstetrician to make sure they are happy with your progress first though. This 'early postnatal information' is especially for you during this time.

Once you hit the six week 'clearance' mark....this is NOT clearance to go full steam ahead with attempting exercise you did pre-pregnancy! Please take things slow, preferably see a Pelvic floor physio for a physical examination to check everything down there is functioning as it should be and gently and progressively get back into exercise. Be sure to incorporate breathing, pelvic floor and core connection exercises into you routines for optimal results and to reduce the risk of pelvic floor or core dysfunction.

So your early Postpartum activities are:

Rest and Recover from birth

Rest and recovery is super important for new mums, your body needs time to heal properly. Some women heal quickly, others may take a while, either way rest helps! The type of birth you have had will also determine how your recovery will go, but either way your body will have some trauma to heal from, from swelling to scar tissue and stitches. If you had a c-section ask me for more information about C-section recovery.



Establish feeding

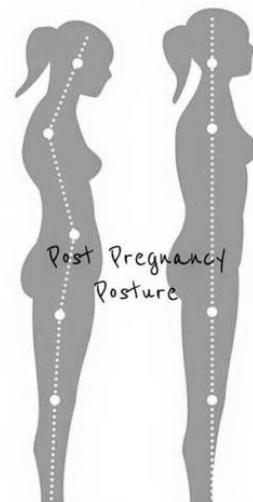
This one is for bubs really, but can have a huge impact on mum, hello mum feeding (and baby snuggling) postures. On top of the weight of engorged breasts, endless hours of snuggles you are bound to have upper body aches and pains from tight and shortened muscles in your chest, upper back and neck. Trying some gentle mobility exercises and stretches can help relieve these tensions. There are some stretches mentioned at the end of this resource for you to try that should help and plenty more inside my online Re-energised Postnatal Recovery Program.

Posture and Alignment

Pregnancy changes your posture dramatically, then after birth your posture continues to be challenged with a compromised core and extra new stresses and strains on your upper body from the weight of your breasts and holding and feeding your baby which often causes rounded shoulders and lengthened back muscles.

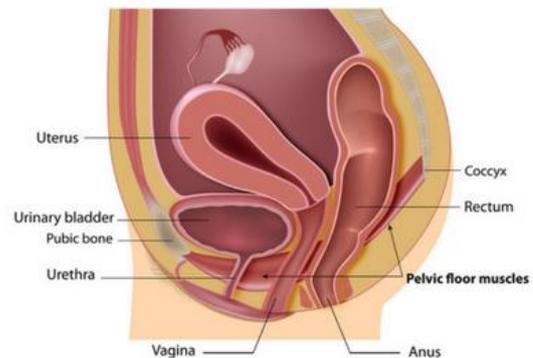
Changes in alignment can affect the body in different ways, causing all sorts of aches, pains and dysfunctions. Although there is no such thing as 'perfect posture', improvements in posture such as being conscious to stack your shoulders and ribs over top of your pelvis will help. Your core and pelvic floor will function better and your body will feel so much better for it.

Your core control, strength and function will be of utmost importance to support optimal posture and alignment.



Pelvic floor activations

Everyone needs to do pelvic floor exercises after pregnancy including those ladies who have had a c-section, after your pelvic floor muscles have supported the weight of your pregnancy and are potentially somewhat stretched and strained and need a little rehabilitation. Hopefully you have been performing pelvic floor exercises throughout your pregnancy but if not here's how to get started (and there is plenty more pelvic floor related information, guidelines and exercises to follow through the rest of the Re-energised Postnatal Recovery program):



To contract your pelvic floor muscles try using these one of these visualisations:

- you are gently stopping yourself going toilet #1's and/or 2's
- holding a tampon in
- picking up a peanut or blueberry with your vagina
- the elevator; imagine your pelvic floor muscles are an elevator, close the door, lift up a level, drop down again and open the doors

Perform up to 10 contractions a couple of times a day for a start. These can be performed laying down, sitting, or standing, if you are a beginner it is easiest to begin lying down on your back and progress to sitting then standing.

Remember to also relax these muscles between each contraction/exercise.

More information on Pelvic floor recovery and exercise in the 'Pelvic floor focus section of my Re-energised Postnatal Recovery program'.

Unfortunately there are a range of pelvic floor dysfunctions that can occur such as prolapse, leaking and pain. If you are having trouble with these exercises or have on-going concerns with leaking or urine or faeces, a bulging feeling between your legs that is not improving during the first six weeks postpartum please speak to your midwife, GP or seek advice from a Pelvic floor physiotherapist, it is common but it is not normal and it is worth seeking a personalised assessment and help to improve your symptoms.

Deep Diaphragmatic Breathing

Learning to re-sync your breathing and getting your diaphragm (breathing muscle at the base of your lungs) to work efficiently after it has been somewhat compromised during pregnancy is super important.

Effective breathing in fact is super important for your core and pelvic floor recovery. You will learn more about this in my Re-energised Postnatal Recovery Program. In the meantime get yourself into a comfortable and nicely aligned position, possibly lying down. Place one hand at the base of your ribs and one on your lower belly. Focus on taking nice deep breaths down into you core, think about taking a 360 breath where you not only breathe into your

belly at the front but direct the inflation to the back, sides and bottom (pelvic floor) of your core system. You might find it helpful to imagine inflating your core like a balloon. Use the hand on your lower ribs as a guide, you should feel some movement of your lower ribs outwards as well as some pressure from your diaphragm contracting downwards into your thumb at the back and fingers at the front. You shouldn't be breathing up into your shoulders. This will ensure your core pressure is nice and uniform and help with your overall effective functioning and reconnecting with your muscles.

Transverse Abdominal activations

Now you have mastered your deep 360 core breathing you need to reconnect to your deep core muscles (not your six pack at the front). These deep transverse abdominal muscles wrap around your core from your spine at the back to the front supporting your core and organs like a corset. During pregnancy they have been stretched so now is the time to reconnect with them for ultimate support of your internal organs and body.

Lying down place your fingers on your lower belly between your hip bones and belly button. Take a deep diaphragmatic breath relaxing, then on your exhale, contract your pelvic floor muscles and gently imagine drawing you hip bones together with a piece of string. Underneath your fingers you should feel a *gentle* tension. There should barely be any movement of your stomach, no sucking in or pushing your fingers out. You should also ensure the top of your belly above your belly button stays nice and relaxed.

Walking

Walking is a great form of low impact exercise for everyone, especially new mums and it is free, it gets you out in the fresh air, its gentle and low impact and it is usually convenient. So, when you feel up to it, you are feeling a little less tender and your bleeding has slowed, take a *gentle* walk. Keep it short to start with and no hills. If you manage the short walks ok with no leaking, vaginal heaviness, pain or overall fatigue you might like to start gradually increasing the distances you venture. If you get the opportunity, try to take a walk without having to push a pram or just pushing with one hand and get a little 'swagger', swing your arms to get some great movement in your upper body to release any tension.

Relieve aches and pains

With all that is going on in these early weeks after your birth you are likely to have some general aches and pains with assuming new and repeated postures holding and feeding your baby along with your body finding its new normal after pregnancy and birth. Performing some gentle upper body mobility stretches daily will likely help with this. You might like to try some snow angels lying on the floor, moving your arms up above your head and down to your sides, backwards shoulder rolls and cat/cow movements.

I hope you notice some improvements in your overall recovery from these tips, to progressively and safely return to optimal strength, fitness and function join me online or in person for my Re-energised Postnatal Recovery Program.