

How can I get my body back after my baby's birth?

Expert: Gillian Fletcher, M.C.S.P. [\[See Biography\]](#)

Question: My baby is due soon, and I'm looking forward to getting my body back. Do you have any guidelines for postnatal exercises?

Gillian Fletcher: Getting back into "regular" clothes is exciting yet challenging for most new mothers. But don't expect to be able to get into your favourite pair of jeans for at least several weeks. Keep in mind it took some 40 weeks to gain your pregnancy weight, so it will take time to lose it, too.

As for guidelines, start out slowly, since you need to conserve your energy to [recover from labour and the birth](#). Many doctors and midwives advise waiting until after your postnatal checkup (usually six weeks after delivery) to start an [exercise routine](#). But even a brand-new mum can begin walking and doing strengthening exercises for her abdominal, lower back, and pelvic muscles the day after delivery, as long as she had a normal vaginal birth.

During the [first six weeks](#), you can begin brisk walking to increase your circulation and get some general exercise. Do what you can handle, even if it's only 10 to 15 minutes, and increase your time as you become stronger. As you walk, don't overstride, and let your arms swing naturally by your sides. Warm up with five to 10 minutes of rhythmic activity such as marching, gentle knee bends, shoulder rolls, and arm circles. Try to exercise three times a week for 20 to 30 minutes.

After you've had your postnatal check up, build up to 50 to 60 minutes of continuous walking, four to five days a week. Of course, you can [take your baby with you](#) in a buggy. Once you can walk comfortably for 20 minutes, begin to increase your speed. Aim to walk one mile in 15 minutes.

With a new baby around, finding the time to fit exercise into your daily life is difficult but not impossible, as long as you make it a priority. Try to do three 10-minute sessions throughout the day if you can't fit in a full 30 minutes with a newborn. And be sure to find an activity that you enjoy and look forward to so exercise isn't a chore.

Exercises that can be done with your baby are often easier to fit into your routine. Some mothers put their baby in a [sling](#) and do some simple dance movements to music. In my case, I sometimes placed my daughter in a front pack and did lunges, squats, and arm weights. You may want to join a postnatal exercise class — these usually have a creche attached and are a good way of meeting other new mothers as well.

Another possibility is an exercise video. Put your baby in an infant seat, high chair, or playpen while you exercise, or time your sessions for her nap time.

Be patient, and keep these tips in mind as you work toward your goal:

- Weigh yourself only once per week to keep the stress of slow weight loss to a minimum. Losing about a pound per week is safe.
- Once you get the green light from your doctor, any type of aerobic exercise will help you shed the extra pounds. Exercises that use large muscle groups (walking, swimming, biking, or jogging) and elevate your heart rate are particularly effective.
- If you're new to the joy of exercise, start slowly and increase your intensity and duration over time. If you exercise too hard too soon after delivery, your vaginal flow (lochia) may increase or turn pink — a signal to slow down.
- If you're [breastfeeding](#), exercise when your breasts aren't full of milk. For comfort and extra support, wear a sports bra over your [nursing bra](#).

- Applaud yourself for small goals and achievements, such as exercising three times per week.
- This isn't the time to diet to lose weight. Though milk production is largely independent of nutritional intake during the first few months of nursing (the fat accumulated in pregnancy provides a ready supply of calories,) if your diet isn't adequate, you're more likely to be fatigued and listless.

Good luck — it'll take some time to get your pre-pregnancy body back, but with persistence you may end up in [better shape](#) than before pregnancy.

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