



message

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Exercising Post-Partum

Over the course of your nine-month pregnancy, your body went through monumental changes in order to develop, nurture, feed, carry and bring into the world the adorable creature that is now the center of your daily preoccupations. Now, here you are with your new baby and a post-partum body that you hardly recognize as your own.

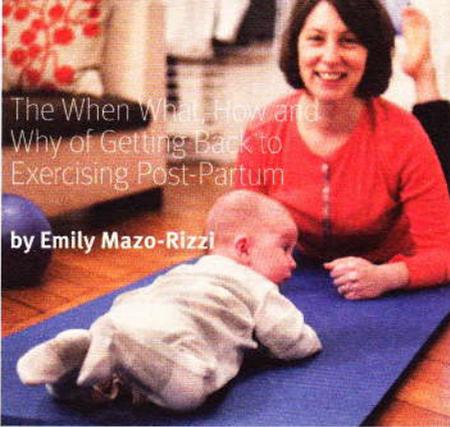
You might be wondering: When will I feel physically capable to safely start exercise again? What can help me get back into shape without further compromising my body after childbirth and extreme levels of exhaustion? How will I possibly find the time to take care of my baby and myself? Why even bother getting into shape now if I want to have another baby in a couple of years or if, by chance, I managed to miraculously lose all the weight already?

These questions challenge every post-partum mom, new or experienced. Let's look at how to answer them.

WHEN?

The short answer is: When you feel like it! When you have passed the point of total physical exhaustion and have gotten into a rhythm with your baby, you find yourself feeling more alert and your body is craving movement other than rocking, feeding and changing. These are signs that your body needs to do something besides being hunched over your precious little one all the time. Your body is ready to enjoy movement again.

The longer answer takes into account certain key issues: Have you started your pelvic floor rehab sessions (la rééducation du périnée)? Carrying the weight of your



The When What, How and Why of Getting Back to Exercising Post-Partum

by Emily Mazo-Rizzi

baby inside of you for nine months, being in labor and pushing during the birth all weaken pelvic floor muscles. France is one of the few countries to include pelvic floor rehab in its usual gamut of post-partum care. It is incredibly smart to do so as it reduces the risk of incontinence and organ prolapse, problems that every woman wants to avoid. If possible, choose a health professional who practices the manual method which is much more adapted to meeting your body's specific needs, thus achieving best results.

Talk to your doctor about your desire to start exercising again when you go for your post-partum visit. Chances are it will be encouraged as long as it is a low impact, which leads us to...

WHAT?

Begin with gentle exercise that includes lots of breathing and rests between series of movements. Start with short periods of exercise and slowly build up.

Choose an exercise method that will help you rebuild abdominal strength, help you relieve any aches and pains you might have from tending to your baby, is low impact, gentle, encourages breathing and is not too strenuous.

As a Pilates instructor, I think that Pilates is especially well-suited as it focuses specifically on strengthening abdominal muscles and doing so with gentle move-

ments coordinated with breathing. Decompressing the spine is one of the goals of the Pilates method and the exercises are perfect for people who spend too much time in one position, such as bending forward over a new baby.

Other good options are gentle practices of Yoga and swimming — once you are allowed to get back into a pool. Simple ways to get moving include taking your baby on a walk in the stroller around your neighborhood, or lying down and concentrating on your breathing, which will relax you, relieving tensions and oxygenating your body.

Whatever method you decide on, choose a teacher who listens to your story and knows your personal needs and can adapt exercises to suit your current condition. When selecting a group class check on class sizes to make sure you won't be lost in a crowd.

HOW?

This might be the killer question, but where there is a will there is always a way!

› Take baby. Many exercise studios in Paris offer post-partum classes for new moms. Having the babies in class is of course distracting but at least you are out of the house, interacting with other moms and exercising in between feeds and snuggles. If you're lucky, baby will sleep through class!

› Exercise at home. Look into bringing a teacher to you. Many Pilates, Yoga and other fitness trainers will teach in homes. Get together with Message moms and have class in your living room. Certainly have a look online for videos of classes, but, if possible, it is advisable to work with an exercise practitioner for safety and best results.

› Wait until your partner comes home. Then it's your turn to head out to exercise.

One night a week out on your own can be a real treat. Leave your guilt at home — you deserve it and your partner will be happy to bond with baby!

› Get a babysitter. If you can afford to and go exercise during the time of day you feel most energetic.

WHY?

You think you might pop out number two in a year or so? You can't be bothered? Your baby is five years old, so it's too late? There are so many excuses, so many reasons not to, but there are far more reasons to "just do it".

Parenting a small child is one of the most physically challenging activities there is, especially in a big city like Paris. In addition to carrying, rocking, and strolling, you schlep up and down stairs in buildings, in the metro and in the streets. You need to be strong in order to carry your children and their things. You need abdominal muscles that support you and protect you from potential injury. Those same muscles are vital for ensuring that your next pregnancy is comfortable and healthy.

You need to feel that you are healthy, strong and that you look good for yourself and your partner. The happier you are, the better parent and partner you will be. Taking care of your body is key in this endeavor.

In the next issue Emily will begin presenting a series of short, illustrated exercises that you can easily do at home. •

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