



Ask the Expert with Dr. Darrell Menard

Find Answers to your Sport Medicine Questions!

Getting New Moms Moving

Q: *I'm pregnant and looking forward to having my first child. While it has been challenging, I have remained physically active throughout my pregnancy. I realize my new baby will significantly change my life and I am looking for some advice on how to safely return to being physically active after my delivery? Future Mom.*

A: Dear Future Mom: congratulations on the upcoming addition to your family. The recovery rate after pregnancy is highly individual and when you are ready, exercising in the postpartum period offers many benefits including: enhanced energy, increased cardiovascular fitness, help with weight management, improved body and pelvic floor strength and reduced risk of anxiety and depression. Here are some suggestions on how to safely resume being physically active:

1. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists state that women who have had a healthy pregnancy and a normal vaginal delivery can start exercising as soon as they feel comfortable. Women who had pregnancy complications, a caesarian section or a traumatic delivery should see their health care provider to determine when they can safely resume physical activity.
2. Start off slowly, listen to your body and progress your physical activity as tolerated. Every woman experiences body changes during pregnancy. It can take several months to reconnect with your new body and resume your fitness program.
3. As soon as possible, begin to engage your core and pelvic floor muscles. Pregnancy and delivery subject your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles to great stress and you depend on these muscles not only to support your abdominal and pelvic organs but to provide a solid base for all body motion. Reconditioning these muscles will also reduce your risk of developing bladder incontinence issues in the future.
4. Start with walking – it's a great form of "gentle" exercise, which can be done soon after your delivery and it doesn't overly stress your pelvic floor muscles.
5. Your body should feel good while moving. Stop exercising if it is painful - this is a clear message your body isn't ready for what you are doing. If the pain persists, see your health care professional.
6. Avoid heavy lifting and high impact activities such as running and jumping until your pelvic floor muscles are reconditioned.
7. Embrace activities that are gentle on your joints. During pregnancy and for up to 12 months after delivery women produce a hormone that loosens their connective tissues and joints. These loose tissues/joints can leave your body feeling less stable and may increase your risk of injury.
8. Wear a supportive bra to provide comfort and to reduce breast motion experienced during exercise.
9. Try breastfeeding or expressing your milk before you exercise as this will be more comfortable. The quality and the amount of breast milk you produce is determined by your calorie and fluid intake, not by how much you exercise.

Bottom line: Regular exercise has been shown to offer new moms many physical and mental health benefits. Following the above 9 tips will help you safely return to being fit enough to keep up with the new addition to your family – enjoy! Movement is Medicine!

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Dr. Darrell Menard is the Surgeon General's specialist advisor in sport medicine. He has worked extensively with athletes from multiple sports and has covered Canadian teams competing at multiple games including the 2012 Olympics and the 2016 Paralympic games. These articles were originally published in the Canadian Forces Journal, the Maple Leaf.

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