

Postpartum Return to Exercise

Most women are released to begin exercising on their own at their 6-week follow-up appointment. However, under the guidance of a qualified physical therapist, it is safe to begin gentle core and hip strengthening exercises much sooner than 6 weeks postpartum. On the other hand, 6 weeks postpartum is also too soon to begin high impact activities such as running and jumping. Your physical therapist will guide you through an appropriate exercise program to get you back to these types of activities.

It is important to understand that every woman's recovery will be different based on individual circumstances. However, here is an example of a timeline and some general guidelines to ensure that you are not doing too much too soon:

First 2 Weeks After Giving Birth

The goal is simply to **reconnect to your deep core**. Early diaphragmatic breathing and deep core activation exercises will help to regulate your deep core system and make progressive deep core strengthening that much easier when the time comes. Ideally, you would have learned these exercises during your pregnancy, which will make them much easier to resume after childbirth. **Walking as tolerated** is generally recommended. In addition, based on examination findings, your physical therapist may provide you with hands-on treatment and patient education to address common postpartum complaints such as low back pain, abdominal separation, and urinary leakage.

Weeks 2-6

Deep core and hip strengthening exercises are progressed, typically working in a neutral spine. We may also begin **functional movement training** such as hip hinging and body weight squats and lunges. Performing these types of movements correctly can help with the many physically demanding tasks required to care for your baby.

After 6 Weeks

If indicated, you may receive an internal pelvic floor assessment at this time. If you had a cesarean birth, and the scar is fully healed, you may be instructed in how to perform direct scar massage to minimize scar tissue adhesions. Core, hip, and full body functional exercises are progressed and loaded gradually. **Low impact forms of cardio** may be introduced when determined appropriate, such as cycling, swimming, and elliptical.

Return to Running and Jumping

You will receive assessments to ensure adequate strength, deep core coordination, and load impact management strategies have been regained before you return to high impact activities such as running and jumping. This is **commonly around 12 weeks postpartum** but varies on a case-by-case basis, as there are many factors to consider.

Red Flags

You may be doing too much too soon if you experience an increase or new onset of any of the following, during or after exercising:

- Pelvic or lower back pain
- Pelvic pressure/heaviness or the sensation that your organs are slipping down or falling out
- Leaking urine or feces
- Midline abdominal doming
- Bleeding

Be sure to let your physical therapist know if you experience any of these symptoms so that your program can be adjusted accordingly.

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