



Healthy Families Homebirth

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Toning Your Body in the First 6 Weeks Postpartum

Regaining tone in your body postpartum can be important in caring for yourself, your baby, and future children. Exercises in the postpartum period are not meant to be strenuous or excessive. Your body will heal itself from pregnancy and labor without much help. The goal is to support muscles so that healing can happen quicker and smoother.

With the influence of relaxin, a hormone that helps with opening the hips, it is recommended that running or any other high endurance exercises wait until at least 3 months postpartum. Walking briskly is fine and encouraged.

Abdominal Toning: The abdominal muscles have been stretched over your growing uterus. These muscles support your lower back and your torso. Regaining tone in this area requires a simple exercise that can be done while breastfeeding, driving, or reading.

To learn: Sit up straight with your back against a flat surface. Place one hand over your belly. On an inhale let the air expand your belly out. On an exhale notice that your belly pulls back in. On your next exhale, as your belly is naturally pulling in, use your hand to push in your belly a little more. Can you feel the muscles under there working? Inhale and let the belly expand, and exhale pushing into your belly a little more. You are finding the core of the rectus abdominis muscles. When you think you have found the core, gently push in a little deeper and that is likely the core.

When the core is found, exhale and let the belly expand a little- not all the way as when relaxed. Then inhale and strengthen the core muscles. Repeat this inhale, exhale routine starting with 10 at each sitting, then 25, and so on until you reach 100 twice a day.

Doing sit-ups or crunches are not useful after pregnancy. The rectus abdominis muscles run up and down the front of the belly and have likely been separated because of the large uterus. Sit-ups actually strain, and separate those muscles further as opposed to strengthening them.

Doing abdominal toning exercises will also strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. As your abdominal muscles are squeezing in, your pelvic floor muscles are lifting up. Can you feel how it is like an elevator in the pelvic floor? You can do a Kegel separately from the abdominal muscle exercise, but most often you will be working different muscles. Most Kegel exercises work the superficial muscles, whereas working the abdominal muscles also works the core pelvic floor muscles.



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Head to Toe: Simple techniques for the muscles in your body can be done to help relax places of tension, stretch the muscles, and tone the body. Be gentle with yourself! Always remember to breathe!

Face: Tighten every muscle of your face, pause for 3 seconds, and release. Are there spots that are harder to release than others? Check in with your forehead, your jaw, and the back of your head. Little massage circles done on the places of tension can help release those spots too.

Neck: Sitting-up, let your head fall to the front, bringing your chin to your chest. Notice any tension in the back of your neck. Gently and slowly roll your head to the left and then to the right. Notice the stretch in your neck muscles

Shoulders: Shrug your shoulders to your ears, pause for 3 seconds and release. Pull your shoulders down, they may only fall a few centimeters, pause for 3 seconds, and release. Shrug your shoulders to the front, pause and release. Exaggerate your shoulders to the back, pause, and release. Now shrug your shoulders to your ears and to the front, tighten your fists, your arms, all the muscles in your shoulders, pause there for 3 seconds, and release it all taking a deep breath in and a deep breath out.

Chest: Puff your chest out, pause here, and release. While sitting, raise one arm straight up and lean over to the opposite side. Left arm straight up, right hand is on the ground next to you for support, and lean over to the right side. Repeat on the other side. This should create a nice stretch in your ribs and side muscles.

Hips: Walking, squatting, and gentle dancing are all fine to do. Avoid for the first 3 months running, jumping, or aerobics as these may disturb the joints in your open hips. Doing figure 8's or hip circles are a great way to soothe a fussy baby and strengthen your hips. Watch if you are always carrying your baby on one side. Remember to do things equally on each side and carry your baby in the center if possible.

Legs and feet: Sitting or lying down, point your toes and flex your feet. Rotate your ankles in circles going one direction, clockwise, then switching, counter-clockwise. When standing, place a rolled up towel under the balls, the front part, of your feet. They should be raised about 2-3 inches or so off the floor. Using a wall, chair, pole, or other support until you gain enough strength, go down into a high squat. Go only as far down as what feels safe to you, pause there for 10 seconds, and release. Take deep breathes sending your breath to the muscles that need it most.



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If you have any concerns about these exercises, or are unsure due to a previous injury, please contact your general health provider for further guidance.

Most of all enjoy your babymoon!