

Baby belly Blues by Dan Roach

So the stork has delivered a little bundle of joy into your life, but with it left you with nappies to change and a body to get back into shape. But while the joys of parenthood far outweigh any of the downsides, help and advice is at hand to ensure you banish that baby belly and get back into shape. Remember, getting fit doesn't mean gym membership or 10 mile runs. It starts at home and baby can join in too!

How soon after giving birth can I start exercising?

You can begin to exercise your pelvic floor and lower tummy muscles as soon as you feel ready. Getting out and about is good for your physical and mental health, so try to take your baby out for regular walks in his pram or pushchair as soon as you feel up to it.

Your physical capabilities will determine if you are ready to exercise before your six-week postnatal check. Generally, if you exercised right up until the end of pregnancy, you can probably safely perform your pregnancy workout, or at least light exercise and stretching from the start. If you stopped exercising during your pregnancy or your new to fitness, it is better to start exercising again more slowly. If your thinking about attending group exercise classes you should wait until after their postnatal check before attending or find a low-impact class with plenty of toning and stretching and let the teacher know you have just had a baby.

Delay exercising if you experienced back or pelvic pain during your pregnancy and talk to your GP before starting an exercise programme.

So, what's the best way to lose weight?

Understandably most new mums are eager to work off the extra weight of pregnancy as soon as their baby is born although the immediate postnatal period is not a good time to start dieting, especially if you are breastfeeding. Trying to speed up weight loss whilst breastfeeding may mean that your milk will contain chemicals called ketones which are potentially unhealthy for your baby. Breastfeeding mums need around 200 calories a day more than when they were pregnant in order to provide enough nutritional milk for their baby and meet their own nutritional needs as well.

Eating sensibly and exercising regularly *together* give you the best chance of returning to a healthy weight more quickly and safely. Remember, brisk walking with a pram in the park is a great form of exercise.

Many women will lose weight simply through breastfeeding, but this is not true for everyone. Remember that it took nine months to put on the weight, so don't expect to lose it too



quickly. As a rule, try to regard the first year as the time it may take you to get back to normal weight safely. Any celebrities you read about losing their weight in six weeks are not doing themselves or their babies any favours!

A sensible goal is to lose no more than a pound a week. This is not only safe but will also help to ensure that the weight stays off. The best way is to do some form of aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking or swimming, as well as eating sensibly. Try to get your heart beating faster but aim to still be able to hold a conversation. Adding resistance, (toning), exercises to your routine will help to firm up your body and raise your metabolism. This will make it easier to maintain your desired weight.

Aim to work out for at least 30 minutes - include exercises targeted at toning the muscles most affected by pregnancy - at least three to five days a week. If you weren't active during your pregnancy, start with a 15-minute programme and gradually increase to 30 minutes. If you tapered off your fitness routine as your pregnancy progressed, begin at the level you stopped exercising at when you were pregnant and increase the intensity or time as you feel ready. If you develop any aches or pains, ask your GP for advice.