

POSTNATAL PILATES

You went through pregnancy eating well, staying fit and exercising and now that the baby is here you're wondering "Can I get back the body I had before I was pregnant?" Yes it is possible through exercise and a healthy diet, just as before and during pregnancy. Pilates can be particularly helpful in strengthening and flattening the deep lower abdominal muscles that are hard for postpartum women to tone after delivery. Every exercise in Pilates, including breathing, requires your abdominals to be held taught and flat as though your naval were being pulled towards your spine, always working the deepest layer of your abdominal muscles. Pilates also helps address pelvic floor weakness which causes many new mothers to leak urine during and after pregnancy.

Another area that is strained during pregnancy and after is the back. As the body's centre of mass changes during pregnancy, more strain is put on the back. Abdominal muscles are stretched and have lost a lot of their tone. This lack of muscle tone can make women susceptible to back injuries due to the new physical demands of lifting and carrying a new baby.

After the baby is born, picking the baby up, holding the baby on your hip, breast feeding or just getting on and off a bed can be hard on the body and can cause strain on the back. There are many exercises in Pilates that help strengthen the back muscles.

Pilates exercises not only focuses on strengthening and toning the weakened muscles due to pregnancy, they also improve sleep, minimize depression, help address postural issues which may have developed through pregnancy and the breathing technique helps increase the amount of oxygen taken in by the lungs on each breath resulting in increased blood flow, aiding in the healing process and increasing energy.

Those who have had a caesarean section probably have been told not to put any strain on your abdominals for about six weeks or until the scar has healed. When you are ready for exercise you may find it tough feeling your abdominals because most of the muscle has been cut through and replaced with scar tissue. Patience is required.

All the Pilates exercises can be done by postnatal women provided enough healing time after birth has been allowed. Always consult a doctor before starting any exercise program after your baby is born.



Side leg splits on the reformer. Strengthens gluteus medius. Not all Pilates exercises are done lying down.



Oblique work. Exercises may be done sitting on the reformer both up on a box or crossed legged.



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