



Post-pregnancy WORKOUT

Mike Clarke, Personal Trainer



I get many queries and concerns expressed by parents regarding the challenges experienced when attempting to attend a gym on a regular basis. I appreciate the at times irregular/disrupted sleep patterns, that feeling of fatigue that never seems to fade, and of course working in around children's routines. However, exercise does become easier with regular exercise times so a bit of trial and error will help find the 'best fit' time.

Hopefully this article will help manage some of these issues and get you back on track.

It can be tough to bounce back after your baby. The most common challenge is finding time and energy while still feeling able to remain devoted to your newborn's and other

family members' needs. However, broadening your perception of exercise can help get fitness back into your lifestyle/routine.

There are fun ways to shape up that can benefit not only you but baby too! It's an enjoyable way to bond. My wife, Angela, has established a routine with our daughter, Tori (who recently turned one and we survived!). This enabled Angela to exercise and feel she was able to regain some of her pre-pregnancy body shape/fitness as part of our plan for baby two (due August).

The home routine was formed around Tori's sleeping, eating and play times, thus enabling high and low activity periods. Morning sleeps during the warmer months enabled activities such as mowing lawns or

step-ups (with varying intensity) depending on energy levels. These times would also be to catch up on sleep if required/able.

Be flexible and don't be too tough on yourself – baby routines do change and sometimes even the best laid plans can go awry!

HERE are some basic suggestions for **exercises**

MEALTIMES – either parents' or baby's

Sitting on a swiss ball will help strengthen your core muscles. If you don't have a swiss ball try sitting on the dining chair but at the front so you don't lean against the back of the chair. Think about sitting tall. It's okay to 'flop' for brief

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periods — remember you are just starting to work those muscles and they will initially fatigue quicker than they used to.

The swiss ball helps to isolate the muscles more as your body makes fine adjustments required to maintain balance. The unseen benefits are that blood flow will increase to your back, in turn providing improved nourishment (oxygen and nutrients) to this area. This helps to alleviate lower back pain, commonly experienced during and post-pregnancy due to the increased workload of the back as your body shape changes to accommodate the growing baby.

The best mealtimes are those that are relaxed. Whether breastfeeding or bottle feeding, these times can also be a great opportunity for mum and/or dad to focus on themselves through meditation/basic relaxation techniques. Sit tall with shoulders relaxed and strong core muscles, breathe deeply in and out through your nose (yoga breathing) filling your lungs so that you can feel your abdomen expanding and relaxing.

Your posture is important – try taking a deep breath in while slouched! If the environment can be de-stressed, even better (relaxing music etc.) but when other little ones are around it will take a bit of practice (especially while keeping one eye on the others). Night or evening feeds may be your best time to try.

LOWER Body Workout (while holding baby)

Squats / Standing Lunges

Remember that, post-partum, the muscle and tendon attachments around your hips and pelvis will not be as firm or stable as beforehand due to the movement in preparation to the birthing process. Don't try to go too low, and keep things controlled – forget jump lunges initially. As with all exercise consideration of any other underlying physical or medical condition is required – if in doubt consult your GP.

Squats and lunges can be easily incorporated into daily activities, including playtime and even settling time with baby (it can provide a change from walking around the house). Make sure you have your baby well supported and close to your body. This is very important so if you feel the support is being compromised take a break.

Squats are great for shaping thighs and glutes (butt) – especially the inner thigh. Lunges are also excellent for toning thighs and glutes. They also provide an opportunity to shift the emphasis from front to/fro back of the thighs (stationary, walking, reverse lunges etc).



Be FLEXIBLE and don't be too TOUGH on yourself – baby ROUTINES do CHANGE and sometimes EVEN the BEST laid PLANS can go AWRY!

BACK and Hamstring (back of leg) Stretch

This exercise opens the spine, alleviates lower back tension, lengthens the hamstrings (very common muscles to be tight/shortened), increases blood flow to the brain thereby increasing oxygen to the brain.

Place your baby, lying back down, on the floor. Stand with your legs shoulder width apart and a slight bend at the knees. Without buckling through your legs or collapsing your spine, bend slowly at the waist allowing gravity to position your arms perpendicular to the floor as you lower. Hold for 20 – 30 seconds at the lowest point of comfort. Stand up by simply bending your knees and walking your hands up your legs.

Position yourself so your hands will be moving down directly to your baby. This provides visual stimulation for the baby as you come down and something for them to reach up to, and at your lowest point while in hold position, you can play with baby.

PUSH-UP – Kisses

Self explanatory really but at the lowest point of each push-up give your baby a kiss! Remember that the “knees on ground” position is not only good for beginners but is good to change to when losing technique if doing full press-ups!

This exercise is great for the total body including increasing muscular endurance in abdominals (tummy)



Well that should help to get you started...

GOOD luck and ENJOY!

If you have any questions please contact me at befit@xtra.co.nz

and lower back muscles. It will tone shoulders, chest and triceps (back of upper arms).

BRIDGING or Plank

This is basically a freeze frame of the push-up at the lowest position and with forearms flat on the floor. This position when held REALLY isolates the abdominal muscles. Keep arms at right angles from your shoulder to avoid shoulder problems. If you have never done these before don't be disheartened if you can not sustain the position for very long. It's more important to keep good technique. With your baby lying on the floor near you, interaction can continue.

BABY CRUNCHES with Glute Squeezes

You can rock and roll your baby with this exercise. Keep baby secure on your lap and hold their hands. The baby can lean back against

your thighs until they develop their sitting ability.

Perform the crunch as per standard crunch then follow with a glute squeeze (the squeeze should raise you buttock/pelvis off the ground). The combination provides a gentle rock and roll motion for the baby to enjoy while you gain the physical benefits too!

STAR POSE (yoga)

This stretch is for the pelvic and lower back regions.

Sit on the floor with your legs bent and opened to the sides. Bring the soles of your feet towards each other but leave a gap between your feet and your body of 1-2 feet. You can place your baby in between your legs with their head resting on your feet.

Gently lean forward and you should feel the stretch through your hips and lower back.