

3 Exercises for First Six weeks

Pregnancy and labor can be very traumatic on the abdominals and pelvic floor. While some women are told not to do any exercise for the first four to eight weeks after having a baby, it is important to begin to engage the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles quickly after birth. The three exercises listed below are key in helping your body heal and recover from pregnancy and childbirth. These exercises will also help prepare your body for its return to exercise when your doctor gives the go ahead.



1. Pelvic Lifts

The first exercise you will want to start with is a simple pelvic floor lift—often called a Kegel. This exercise is by far the most important and helpful thing you can do to begin to heal and recover your postpartum body. Many doctors will encourage women to start doing Kegels while still in the hospital. This exercise is especially important if you plan to return to exercise soon after delivery, as a functional pelvic floor is necessary for most forms of exercise.

How to do a Kegel exercise: Imagine a large muscle that spans your hip bones, and reaches from pelvic bone to tailbone. Now imagine lifting that muscle up and holding it for 5 seconds before releasing. Some women find an easy way to visualize this is to imagine stopping the flow of urine. If you are less than 10 days postpartum, you may find it very difficult to perform this exercise, but keep at it. Your goal should be to lift, hold for 5 seconds, and release your pelvic floor. After you can do that sequence, you will want to move to the next stage: quick flicks. This is where you will fully contract and then fully release your pelvic floor. Think, simply: lift, lower, lift, lower, lift, lower. Alternate 20 seconds of quick flicks with 20 seconds of your 5 second holds. Try to perform this sequence 3 times a day; some women find it helpful to do these while changing diapers or feeding the baby. Note: do not perform Kegels while peeing. It can cause a urinary tract infection.



2. "Hollowing Out" Your Abs

The second exercise that is safe to perform in the first weeks after pregnancy is a simple transverse abdominal contraction. Your transverse abdominals are the most interior abdominal muscles and are extremely important when it comes to core stability and posture. Getting these deep abdominal muscles moving is a great way to begin to repair core muscles that were overstretched and weakened during pregnancy.

How to do it: Draw your belly button up and back; imagine pulling it to your spine. To begin, hold for 5 seconds, and work up over the first few weeks to 20 seconds. These are great to do as you are feeding your baby, as they encourage correct feeding posture. Literally sucking in your belly and engaging your abdominals is the best strengthening exercise you can do in the first weeks after delivery.



3. Chest Stretches

Nearly everything you do as a new mom is going to have you hunched forward over your baby. (See: Posture handout). These activities combined with enlarged breasts means most new moms walk around hunched over a majority of the time. Not only is it extremely important to stretch out your chest muscles, it will also help with posture and back pain. You will also find that it feels great! Actively opening up your chest muscles and breathing deeply is a simple exercise that can help combat depression.

How to do it: Stand sideways next to a wall so that one of your shoulders is touching the wall. With a straight arm, place the palm of your hand on the wall beside you at shoulder height. Take 2 or 3 small steps forward. You will feel a stretch across your chest. Repeat on the other side. This can be helpful to do after you place your baby down in the crib or swing. It will give your chest a nice stretch before moving on to the next task of the day.