Exercises After Childbirth

Many women want to get back into shape after their pregnancy. Exercise is important to:

- Help you reach and maintain your ideal weight.
- Improve your muscle tone and heart/lung fitness.
- Help you deal with stress, give you more energy and a sense of well-being.

Your health care provider may suggest some exercises to begin while you are in the hospital, gradually increasing over the first few weeks. Check with your health care provider about resuming other exercise or aerobic activity. Be realistic in your plan for exercise and weight loss. Plan on four to eight months to reach your goal.

The following exercises will give you some basic steps to help you get started. These exercises can help strengthen the muscles that were stretched by pregnancy and birth. They are excellent for the postpartum period. If your health care provider approves, you can begin them soon after delivery. Start with 3 to 5 repetitions and gradually work up to 10 repetitions. Decrease your activity if you find the exercises cause discomfort.

1. Kegel exercises; refer to handout “Pelvic Floor Exercises (Kegel Exercises)”

Wait four weeks after a Cesarean birth before doing the following exercises.

2. Abdominal breathing
   Lie on your back with your knees bent. Inhale through your nose, allowing your abdomen to expand. Then exhale slowly through your mouth while contracting your abdomen. Make sure your shoulders and neck do not move during this exercise.

3. Pelvic tilt
   Lie on your back with your knees bent. Press the small of your back against the floor while tightening the stomach and buttocks. Hold this position for several seconds.
4. Chest strengthening
Lie on your back and extend your arms straight out to the sides. Keeping your elbows straight, bring your hands together above your chest. Return to the starting position. With your elbows bent, clasp your hands together above your chest. Press your hands together for 3 seconds, then relax.

5. Knee rotations
Lie on your back with your knees bent. Bring your knees together, then rotate them slowly to the left until they touch the floor (or as far as is comfortable). Next, rotate them to the right, again trying to touch the floor. Keep your shoulders flat on the floor and your feet stationary throughout this exercise.

6. Sit-ups
Lie on your back with your knees bent. Raise your head and shoulders and reach for your knees with arms outstretched until you achieve a partial sitting position (your waist should remain on the floor). Then slowly lower your head and shoulders back to the starting position.

7. Hip raise
Lie on your back with your knees bent, arms at your side, and feet flat on the floor. As you push down with your feet, slowly raise your hips up off the floor. Slowly return to the starting position.