

Postnatal rehabilitation



What is postnatal rehabilitation?

Targeted postnatal rehabilitation programs present the opportunity to reverse the deconditioning caused by pregnancy. Appropriate exercise prescription can restore stability and strength, as well as prevent weakness in the pelvic floor, abdominal wall and pelvis later in life.

How does exercise help with postnatal rehabilitation?

Benefits of appropriate postnatal exercise are:

- Improved core and lower back strength and stability
- Improved trunk mobility and flexibility
- Reduction in upper-back, lower-back and pelvic pain
- Improved posture
- Reduction in diastasis recti (abdominal separation)
- Increased cardiovascular fitness
- Increased energy
- Reduction in tiredness and fatigue
- Improved pelvic floor strength and function
- Reduction in urinary incontinence
- Improved wellbeing, self-esteem and body image
- Reduction in depression symptoms

What type of exercise is best for postnatal rehabilitation?

Medical clearance should be sought before starting exercise and it may range from 24 hours to 8 weeks after delivery. Readiness to return to exercise is dependent upon a number of factors including health status, fitness, age and the pregnancy, labour and delivery experience. Exercise resumption needs to be slow with a gradual progression. It should be tailored to the individual and their physical and emotional requirements. Aim for relaxation and invigoration, rather than exercise that causes stress and fatigue. Seek the advice of an Accredited Exercise Physiologist who can create a tailored exercise program.

Include both aerobic and anaerobic exercises and incorporate strength training. Target all muscle groups and body parts. Be patient with fitness progress, as many women (including athletes) do not return to pre-pregnancy fitness levels for 1-2 years.

Exercises to include:

- Pelvic floor exercises
- Trunk stabilization exercises
- Pelvic stabilisation exercises
- Pelvic strength and flexibility exercises
- Postural strengthening, particularly upper and lower back
- Slowly resume aerobic exercise
- Include strength exercises
- All major muscle groups targeted

Exercises to avoid in the initial stages:

- Exercises that cause a bearing down on their pelvic floor
- Traditional abdominal exercises such as a crunch or plank
- High impact exercises and jumping
- Fast or lateral movements
- Changes of direction movements
- Extremes of joint flexion/extension
- All activities that cause discomfort or heavy post partum bleeding

Always seek professional advice from an Accredited Exercise Physiologist. Find one here: www.essa.org.au/find-aep