

Returning to exercise in the post-natal period

Exercise progression from 0-3 months

Week 0 to 2

- Pelvic floor muscle exercises (once catheter is removed) targeting strength and endurance functions.
- Basic core exercises e.g pelvic tilt, bent knee fall out, side lying abduction.
- Walking (for cardio exercise)

Week 2 to 4

- Progress walking/pelvic floor muscle exercises/core rehab
- Consider introduction of squats, lunges and bridging, in line with the functional requirements of day-to-day life as a new mother.

Week 4 to 6

- Introduce low impact exercise e.g static cycling or cross-trainer taking into account individual postnatal recovery, mode of delivery and perineal trauma. Recovery should be such that the new mother is comfortable sitting on a saddle.

Week 6 to 8

- Scar mobilisation (for either c-section or perineal scar)
- Power walking
- Increased duration / intensity of low impact exercise
- Deadlift techniques beginning at light weights no more than the weight of the baby in a car seat (15kg) with gradual load progression e.g barbell only with no weight. This aims to strengthen and restore strategies for carrying out the normal everyday tasks required when caring for a newborn and/or older siblings.
- Resistance work during core and lower limb rehab

Week 8 to 12

- Introduce swimming (if lochia has stopped and there is no issues with wound healing).
- Spinning (of comfortable sitting on a spinning saddle).

From week 12, before returning to running / high intensity exercise you should be able to do all of the following without any heaviness, incontinence or moderate pain (3/10 or less if you were rating it).

- Pelvic floor exercises in standing (fast x10; min of 6 sec x 10; 60 sec contraction holding between 30-50% of your maximum contraction)
- 30 minute walk without any symptoms of heaviness / vaginal discomfort
- Single leg stand, 10 sec each side
- Shallow squats (only to seated position, ideally single leg) x 10
- 1 min jog on spot
- Forward jumps x 10
- Hop x 10 each leg
- Running man x 10
- Single leg calf raises x 10 each leg
- Single leg stand up from chair x 10 each side
- Raising leg out to the side whilst lying on your side x 10 each side

Returning to running 12 weeks post-natal and beyond

- Graded return to running e.g 'couch to 5km plan'
- Goal specific – agree short and long term goals
- For challenging goals consider working with a running coach
- Risk factors to injury e.g obesity reduce distance to a couch to 3km rather than 5km
- Build training volume (e.g distance/time) before intensity
- Monitor signs and symptoms and modify program appropriately or signpost to professional help to address postnatal issues.