Take care of yourself too

Postnatal Bodycare
Gently does it!

For nine months, your body adapts and changes to accommodate your growing baby. It's a big job, in anyone's eyes! Then there's labour and giving birth, which take their toll on you physically too. No wonder your body needs a little extra attention and TLC.

Of course, finding time for yourself can be difficult. And you probably feel like you've barely got the strength to pour a bowl of cereal, let alone begin a new fitness regime.

Don't worry though - just as your baby has to learn to sit before they can stand, your body needs to recover before it can get fit.

Where do I start?

There are a few recommended postnatal exercises designed with new mums in mind. By focusing on the areas that have had to carry the biggest load, each exercise aims to rebuild and strengthen the most used muscles.

The good news is, you can start doing the basics as soon as you're feeling up to it. You can even do some of the exercises while you're feeding, changing nappies or queuing in the supermarket. And as you'll soon discover, doing two things at once becomes second nature for a busy mum!

Get a good grounding

The pelvic floor muscles support your uterus and help control your bladder and bowels. During pregnancy and birth these muscles stretch and will need to be toned up after your baby is born. Fortunately, you can do pelvic floor exercises at home, in the car, in fact, just about anywhere. So they won't take up too much of your precious time.

Simply squeeze your pelvic muscles as if you're trying to stop yourself spending a penny and passing wind at the same time. This action draws your pelvic floor inwards and upwards. Hold it for a couple of seconds (remembering not to clench your bum!), then let go and relax.

"Just the thought of exercise tired me out so I was pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to get started."

When you start, try squeezing tight for as long as you can. As you get stronger, try to keep the muscles tensed for 5-10 seconds, building up to 10-20 seconds.
As your bump expands during pregnancy, your stomach muscles stretch and often separate, leaving a gap after birth. To help them return to normal, lie on your side and let your tummy relax. Take a deep breath, and as you breathe out gently, pull your lower stomach towards your spine. Hold this for a few seconds, breathing normally, then relax. Repeat 4-5 times, resting in between. Build up to a 10-second hold repeated 10 times.

Let it all hang out

After your 6-week check, try doing this exercise when you’re changing a nappy - kneeling down on all fours with your back straight.

And every time you lift something – whether it’s your baby or a bag of shopping – pull your deep abdominal muscles in.

Do the tilt
Once you can do the first exercise, another exercise to try is the basic pelvic tilt. Lie on your back with both knees bent, breathe in. As you breathe out, draw in your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and tilt your pelvis by squeezing your buttocks gently so the hollow of your back becomes flat. Hold for 5 seconds, breathing out, then relax. Repeat 4-5 times, building up to a 10-second hold repeated 10 times.

Hold your head high
Once you’ve mastered the pelvic tilt, add a pelvic floor squeeze and gently lift your head for a few seconds, breathing normally (don’t carry on if your tummy pushes out). In due time, try to keep your head and shoulders up for about 10 seconds as you reach for your knees.

Always squeeze your pelvic floor muscles when doing this exercise to avoid weakening your pelvic floor.
Take 5

Try to switch off and have five minutes to yourself every day
Release the tension by pulling your shoulders down, then relaxing
Breathing in and out slowly will help you clear your mind and stay calm.

Getting back on track

You may be keen to work off that excess weight you put on during pregnancy. However, returning to your normal exercise routine isn’t recommended until after your 6-8 week check up when your doctor can advise you on a suitable fitness programme. Be patient - you’ll get there eventually!

Watch your back

Bending and pushing is part and parcel of looking after your baby. And if you don’t watch your posture, you could find yourself back in bed with new aches and pains.

Here are a few tips to keep you on your feet:

- When picking up your little one, always bend your knees and keep your back straight.
- At feeding time, place a cushion behind your waist, a pillow on your lap, and sit well back in your chair.
- Avoid low seats if you can, and try to change and bath your baby at waist height.