

# Postnatal yoga tips



Advice for doing yoga after your baby has arrived. *By Kat Farrants & Sally Parkes*

**P**regnant mothers tend to become much more aware of their bodies during pregnancy as this is when the body obviously becomes the home and a source of nourishment for someone else, for another being. We have the realisation that we have this amazing body that is capable of creation, and the capacity to nurture a baby until he or she is ready to move into the world. We also start to take more of an interest in our overall health too. This is a time when some mothers learn breathing techniques, how to use them during the birth of their baby, and how these techniques

can be employed to manage discomfort and stress levels throughout the pregnancy.

However, after pregnancy, when a new mother needs the most help to recover, postnatal care options can often be lacking. New mothers may soon realise their body isn't quite the same and that their regular exercise training and pre-baby yoga just doesn't feel right. In order to empower herself, the new mother needs to know exactly how her body has changed and how she can respectfully work with her new body, rather than perceiving it as a project that needs 'fixing'. This is especially true if she has had a C-section or experienced other

birth trauma, as there is a deep healing that needs to take place before a progressive movement routine can be undertaken.

The most effective way to introduce appropriate movement back into the daily routine without causing damage is by working through very short sequences that can be done easily at home whilst your baby takes a nap or plays. And always remember, if you ever feel guilty about taking this time for yourself, know that you have to look after yourself to look after others.

Try these simple post-natal recovery yoga postures at home to begin gently integrating movement back in to your daily routine:

## Table stretch

This is a great way to stretch out achy shoulders and backs. Place the hands on the edge of a table or window sill and lower the torso so it is parallel to the floor, and the hips are over the ankles, so body is at a right angle. Hold for 10 long, deep breaths. This will give a wonderful stretch to the spine, hamstrings and calf muscles.

## Shoulder roll

Throughout the day, practice standing upright with the spine in a neutral alignment





and repetitively roll the shoulders down away from the ears, whilst gently drawing the tummy in towards the spine. This is especially useful to do when walking with the buggy as this is often when you are looking down at your baby and not thinking about posture. This is, however, the perfect time to reset the posture and, by doing so, you will feel more positive as you walk in the fresh air with your baby.

### Abdominal activation

From around eight weeks post-natal the mother can start to work a bit more directly on the abdominal area. It is likely the abdominal muscles themselves will still be a little separated at this point so this area should be trained as a unit involving all the surrounding muscle groups as opposed to isolating certain areas of the abdomen, so it is more functional to the mother's day-to-day work. Effective movements include:

- Kneeling abdominal activation: kneel on hands and knees in a box position and ensure a neutral alignment of the spine so excess pressure to the lumbar region is minimised. Breathe in fully before exhaling deeply whilst drawing the abdomen in towards to spine so the entire abdominal area gently contracts. Relax on the inhale. Repeat this 10 times.
- Sitting abdominal activation: sit in a chair without back support (so your back and abdomen have to work harder to support you). Ensure your back is straight and feet are on the ground. Take a deep exhale and at the same time raise one foot off the ground. The challenge is to keep the torso completely still whilst the foot is off the ground. Hold on the inhale and relax the leg as you exhale. Repeat twenty times, alternating legs.

Initially, you may find you are able to contract the abdominal muscles only very slightly, if at all. But by setting the intention through regular practice, you will stimulate the muscle memory and the muscle fibres will slowly begin to activate again.

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### YOGA ASANA AND MOVEMENTS TO AVOID

- ✗ Deep spinal twists such as Revolved Triangle and Lord of the Fishes.
- ✗ Abdominal Curls and anything that puts pressure on the abdomen, including High Plank and Four Limbed Staff Pose.
- ✗ Deep extension of the spine such as Upward Facing Dog and all other back bends should also be avoided as all these movements may hinder healing of any scar tissue and place undue pressure on the lumbar region.

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