



## Vaginal Birth Recovery Guidelines

As women and mother's, it took our bodies up to 40 weeks to change and adapt for our babies to grow and develop. We experienced hormonal changes, emotional changes and physical body changes throughout this journey.

**Ribs:** Your rib cage increased by about 10-15 cm around.

**Pelvis:** Your kegel muscles were preparing to open to allow your baby to come through, so no matter how you delivered your baby your muscles needs to help to return to a normal stable state in order to reduce back pain, hip pain, pelvic pain, prolapse and urinary/fecal incontinence.

**Organ position:** Baby filled up a large space in your belly, and organs shifted around to make this room for babies growth.

**ABDOMINALS:** Your Transverse Abdominus, Rectus Abdominus, External and Internal Obliques lengthened and our linea alba may have stretched as baby and belly grew throughout pregnancy. These natural processes if not reCOORDINATED with breath can contribute to postpartum leakage, prolapse, pelvic and hip pain, low back pain.



## Prenatal & Postpartum Fitness

First and foremost, your body is AMAZING! The changes it went through during pregnancy, then the labor and delivery process AND what our bodies can naturally do in the healing process for itself postpartum is the most wonderful and miraculous!

Do NOT rush to “get back” to your pre-pregnancy body. Our bodies develop and change postpartum. Each woman’s perception of her body is unique and understanding the changes in your body can help inspire and embrace a new perception of your postpartum body.

Enjoy this miracle you just brought into the world. Reflect (when you can) on what your body and mind just accomplished!

Concentrate on now developing a new physical connection with your baby. Relax, snuggle, hydrate and nourish YOUR body and mind. That should be our immediate number one priority for ourselves.

Remember the old saying, “you cannot pour from an empty glass” or “you cannot fully help another unless you are taking care of yourself first.” I know this takes on a



new meaning when you have your baby in your arms for the first time and there on out.

For many mothers, we just poured it all out of the glass during the delivery and labor process. We may be pushing forward and trying to use the little drops left in our glass following birth. Take as much help as you can to slowly allow yourself to refill that glass. Yes, baby needs a lot of attention and will continuously need you to pour more out just as your refilled some. That is how it goes. Just remember, asking for help, accepting help or taking the little time in between babies naps/sleep to do just one thing for yourself (nap, shower, eat, hydrate) can help do miracles refilling your glass.

The concept of those old saying is still try to many degrees. Resting when baby does and not feeding. Asking for help postpartum from significant others/partners, family and friends is OK! After all, you just birthed a tiny human out of your vagina (and for many it was several hours plus the 40 weeks of your body changing and adapting to create this human).

Many women navigate breastfeeding and that in itself can be stressful, trigger anxiety and takes a lot of our time postpartum. Allow others to help when and where they can with household tasks, grocery shopping and meals, helping if with other children in your household or helping when they can with baby so you can rest or even shower (my husband had to literally remind me daily to shower!). Showering....a simple tasks that we seemingly forget to do in the early days postpartum.



Your vagina and tissues are swollen and inflamed following vaginal births. It can take up to 2 weeks for that initial swelling and inflammation to resolve and calm down and another 4 weeks for pelvic floor muscles to return to

1. Prepare with stocking up before baby on LOTS of heaviest maxi pads for the bleeding.
2. You can use cold packs to place in the pads to help reduce that initial swelling and inflammation.
3. Avoid sitting with prolonged pressure in that area initially.
4. Avoid wiping vaginal and anal areas directly and use a water bottle with luke warm to spray down to help cleanse area, followed by blotting the vaginal and anal area dry.

### **Core Muscle Recovery**

1. Exercise is best when managed by your Physical Therapist to keep track of your blood pressure and to make sure that you are safe during your fourth trimester healing and recovery process.
2. Follow the guidelines for starting your exercise program day one in the section below.
3. Consider relaxing with your baby for about 2 weeks! This helps decrease your chance of developing prolapse, helps you heal, and helps you to establish a breastfeeding relationship and a relationship overall! If you attended our Prenatal Courses- you can practice the breathing techniques and light contractions of your pelvic floor and lower abdominals when you feel ready.
4. Log roll in and out of bed to help avoid putting additional stress on the Diastasis Rectus Abdominis (aka the Pooch, Mommy Tummy) which can worsen or form for 12 weeks postpartum.
5. Remember proper bending, squatting and lifting techniques that you were taught during our Prenatal Courses and Classes. Keep your baby close to your center as much as possible when bending over, lifting, and carrying. Seek assistance from a certified lactation consultant for breastfeeding assistance, remember to switch sides holding and carrying your baby to avoid overuse of core and muscles on one side.



Prenatal & Postpartum Fitness

### **Episiotomy/Tear Recovery**

1. Tearing or an episiotomy increases your risk for prolapse, incontinence, and pelvic pain. There are techniques to help prevent build up of scar tissue and assist the healing process of those tissues....seek assistance and guidance from a Women's Physical Therapist.
2. POTTY SQUATTY - Avoid constipation and bearing down during bowel movements. Put your feet up on a step stool to help prevent bearing down and excessive pushing during the bowel movements. Body mechanically, this position helps aid in the bowel movements.
3. Avoid sitting on the toilet or a donut for extended periods of time. Go to the bathroom when you feel a bowel movement come on. If you are unable to have a bowel movement immediately, do not continue to sit – get up and move around – stay hydrated and healthy balanced diet. Remember, part of constipation can occur due to hormonal changes. It takes your body postpartum time to readjust hormone levels and can take longer if breastfeeding.
4. At your 6 week PT appointment, they will go over what to do next.

## Exercise Guidelines

**Body Changes After Pregnancy – Recovery to normal:** The three main components of postpartum recovery are: recovery of proper breathing, muscle function, and organ position. It took your baby months to grow, and you the same amount of time for your body to grow and adapt to baby in womb. It will also take time to recover. During your recovery process, exercise should focus on re-establishing proper core strength with proper breathing techniques, education on safe body mechanics and our body's healing process

**Ribs:** Your rib cage increased by about 10-15 cm around. In order to avoid rib pain in the postpartum period you need to retrain your breathing pattern. We also think there is a connection between poor upper rib movement and mastitis. Follow the mastitis prevention protocol to help prevent onset.



**Pelvis:** Your kegel muscles were preparing to open to allow your baby to come through, so no matter how you delivered your baby your muscles need to help to return to a normal stable state in order to reduce back pain, hip pain, pelvic pain, prolapse and urinary/fecal incontinence.

**Organ position:** Baby filled up a large space in your belly, so now all of your organs need to migrate back to their original position. Organ return can take about 6 weeks. You can help organs return by following our precautions, and restoring your core strength. Additional manual techniques can be beneficial from your trained Physical Therapist.

**Exercise:** Follow the recorded videos created by Dr. Ashley Wozniak that are safe for vaginal birth healing process.

**\*At your 6 week postpartum PT visit, your PT will advance these exercises.**

**Things that are “not normal” but can and do occur – if you experience any of these, please consider seeing Dr. Ashley Wozniak, PT, DPT sooner rather than later. It is easier to address the symptoms now!**

**Please remember, if you have any of these symptoms immediately follow birth, they should start to resolve from naturally healing process of our bodies over the first 6 weeks. Please contact your OB and Dr. Ashley Wozniak prior to your 6 week appointment should they worsen, no improvements are being shown or your natural instinct is “this isn’t getting better and I feel as if it should be.”**



## Prenatal & Postpartum Fitness

- Pain with intercourse (after 6 week postpartum), bowel movements, urination, sitting, walking, moving in and out of bed
- Abdominal pain, hip pain, low back pain, pubic pain, pelvic pain, tailbone pain, thoracic pain, shoulder pain, neck pain.
- Sensation or feeling of “something falling out of your vagina” or a feeling of heaviness in your vagina.
- Burning or itching around your vaginal opening or in your pelvis.
- Sensitive scars.
- Urine leaking, even a little bit! Should return to normal within 6 weeks.
- Fecal leaking/Constipation.
- A split in your rectus muscles, or a pooch when you move.
- Something just doesn’t “feel right”.

1. “Fundamental Topics in Pregnancy and Postpartum”. CAPP-OB Committee of the SoWH. 2013. 2. “Advanced Topic in Pregnancy and Postpartum”. CAPP-OB Committee of the SoWH 2015. 3. Chiarello C, Falzone L, McCaslin K, et al. The effects of an exercise program on DRA in pregnant women. *Journal of Women’s Health PT*. 2005;29(1):11-16. Research Study. 4. Clinch CR, Grzywacz JG, Tucker J, Walls JK, Arcury TA. Characteristics of mother-provider interactions in surrounding postpartum in return to work. *J Am Board Fam Med*. 2009;22(5):498-506. 5. LaPorta Krum L, del Fin M, et al. Effects of conservative physical therapy management post cesarean section : a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Women’s Health in PT*. 2006;30(1):24 6. Mayo Clinic Staff. C-Section: What you can expect Nov 13, 2010. 7. McGovern P, Dowd B, Gjerdingen D, Moscovice I, Kochevar L, Lohman W. Time off work and the postpartum health of employed women. *Medical Care*. 1997;35(5):507-521. 8. Mottola, et. Al. Exercise in the postpartum period: practical applications. *Current Sports Med Reports*. 2002;1:362-368. 9. Noble E. Essential Exercises for the Childbearing Year. 1988. Houghton Mifflin. Boston Ma. 10. Pivarnik, et al. Athletes and pregnancy. *Clinical Obstetrics and Gyn*. June 2003;45(2):403-414. 11. Standring, S. *Gray’s Anatomy*. 14<sup>th</sup> edition. London, UK: Churchill Livingstone Elsevier. 2008. 12. Vleeming A, et al. The posterior layer of thoracolumbar fascia. It’s function in load transfer from spine to legs. *Spine*. 1995;20:7538.