

# You'll Be My Baby

After childbirth, the new mother often feels drained. Those long sleepless nights, being at a loss when the baby cries endlessly and the stress of being thrust into motherhood simply dampen the mood to exercise.

As a matter of fact, most mothers often find it challenging to find time to even pamper themselves, let alone exercise. Their impression of exercise is sweating it out in the gym or jogging outdoors. However, exercise need not be strenuous. Rather, exercise can be in the form of some simple home activity.

In fact, one can start by just doing walks. Once the baby is four weeks old, the mother can take brisk walks with baby in the pram to build up her fitness level. Post-natal blues are common among modern-day mums and just going out for a walk outdoors or doing some simple exercises at home can drive those blues away. The fresh outdoor air, with the company of her husband and baby, will do her a great deal of good. That is because when she is physically active or exercising, endorphins are released and she feels more empowered and less depressed.

In Asian cultures, some new mothers are forbidden to step out of the house during the one-month confinement period. Such a practice can cause a feeling of gloom. Stepping out at least thrice a week for 15 to 20 minutes can be very refreshing.

Before exercising, she should wear a good support bra, hydrate herself adequately, ingest an additional 500 to 600 kilocalories if she is breast feeding, maintain good posture, stretch adequately and express her milk before exercise as some babies appear to resist post-exercise milk (which may be due to the presence of lactic acid).

Strengthening exercises can be done with the baby, sometimes using him as 'free weight'. The main muscles to target of include the arms, legs, back and pelvic floor muscles. A minimum set of 10 repetitions at least twice a week will go a long way. Simple exercises include half squats for the quadriceps, arm raises to strengthen the deltoid muscles, and leg side raises or bridging to strengthen hip muscles. Back strengthening exercises help to prevent backache caused by poor posture during pregnancy and carrying the baby in our arms.

In some women, there is a visible separation of the left and right side of the rectus abdominis muscle which covers the front area of the belly, especially for those who have had multiple pregnancies. This condition is called diastasis recti and it is essential to do appropriate abdominal exercises to help minimise the separation between the muscles.



Childbirth notwithstanding, a women still desire to look good again. She wants to be in control, feel loved and spend time with baby. Cindy Ng, senior physiotherapist, Singapore General Hospital shows you just how to fulfill all these – with the right exercises and your baby in tow.

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Strengthening our pelvic floor muscles is also essential as it will reduce the risk of incontinence. It may not be easy to work the pelvic floor muscles, but once one grasps the concept, one can do the exercises anywhere. To identify the pelvic floor muscles, imagine that you are sitting on the toilet bowl and trying to stop the flow of urine. Do not do this as a form of exercise; it is meant only to identify what the muscles do. A simple pelvic floor exercise is basically drawing one's belly button inwards and upwards while lying down and holding for a few seconds. Alternatively, imagine trying to stop yourself from passing wind and squeezing the muscles around the back passage. Other methods include electrical stimulation, biofeedback or vaginal cones which help to provide feedback when one activates the pelvic floor muscles. Pelvic floor exercises can be done anywhere, every day, and as often as possible.

While exercising increases a woman's fitness level, it also strengthens joints and tones the muscles to help one build up one's muscular stamina. Exercising also helps to drive the blues away and build up your confidence and self-esteem. You will start to look better and feel better; so go on and have a ball with baby as you exercise and enjoy the time of bonding!



**Hip Flexion**

Sit on a chair and place your baby on one's thigh. Lift one's leg up off the seat keeping the knee bent and hold for 5 seconds. Return to starting position. 15 to 20 repetitions.



**Knee extension**

Sit on a chair or bed with baby on your lap. Tighten your thigh muscles and straighten your knee. Hold approximately 5 to 10 seconds and slowly relax the leg. 15 to 20 repetitions



**Hip abduction**

Stand upright carrying your baby. Lift one leg sideways and bring it back keeping your trunk/body straight throughout the exercise. 15 to 20 repetitions.



**Plank (abdominals)**

Place baby on a mat in front of you. Facing your baby, lie with your elbows on the floor at shoulder width apart. Push up your trunk/body and keep it as straight as a plank while leaning on your elbows. 10 to 15 repetitions.



**Bridging**

Place your baby on your thighs or tummy area. Squeeze your buttocks together and lift your buttocks off the ground. Return to starting position. 15 to 20 repetitions



**Wall squats (quadriceps)**

Carry your baby in your arms. Lean your back against the wall and feet about 20cm from the wall. Slowly slide down the wall slightly and hold for 5 seconds. Return to start position. 15 to 20 repetitions.



**Calf stretch**

Face your baby in the pram. Stand with feet hip width apart and take a step forward. Keep feet pointing in the same direction, keep the back leg straight. Hold the stretch for 10 to 15 seconds.



**Hamstrings stretch**

Face your baby in the pram. Flex the ankle and push the heel on the ground keeping the knee straight. Bend upper body forward from hips keeping back straight. Hold the stretch for 10 to 15 seconds.



**Crunch**

Lie on your back with arms stretched out. Tighten your stomach muscles and lift your head and shoulders off the floor. Stabilise the feet on the wheels of the pram. 15 to 20 repetitions



**Abdominals**

Place your hands flat on the floor, fingers pointing forwards. Rest your feet on the floor under the pram. Extend your arms and keep the trunk/body straight. Gradually lower your body until elbows are at 90 degrees. 15 to 20 repetitions.