

STRESS FREE and FIT during your Pregnancy and Postnatally.

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FITNESS

It is easy to agree with the fact that a woman's body goes through more changes throughout pregnancy than a man's would during his whole existence. Given this, make sure that during your pregnancy and postnatal period, you give your body the time it needs to adjust to the changes that will be or have taken place. Be patient and listen to your body.

If it has been some time since you've exercised, it is a good idea to start slowly. Begin with as little as 5 minutes of exercise a day and add 5 minutes each week until you can stay active for 30 minutes a day.

In 2002, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) published their latest pregnancy recommendations which stated that a healthy pregnant woman with a non-complicated pregnancy, not only could exercise, but should exercise. They recommended resuming exercise after baby when you are medically and physically safe.

Lead maternity carer (LMC) clearance is always advised when you start and exercise programme whilst pregnant or postnatal.

Some of the unique bodily changes and discomforts during these times once detracted women from exercise. In fact, exercise is proven to alleviate these ongoing discomforts and furthermore, lead to significant benefits during labour and whilst postnatal. Research has shown stress relief, increased energy levels, better sleeping patterns and overall coping are just a few of the benefits exercise can facilitate. For those of you who are pregnant, studies have concluded that regular exercise can shorten labour by approximately one third, and decrease (by a considerable 75 percent!) the incidence of maternal exhaustion and the need for surgical intervention during the delivery. Postnatally, exercise will help with weight loss, a speedier return to pre-pregnancy and combating postnatal depression. Exercise releases the mood-elevating and 'feel-good' endorphins and suppresses the release of adrenal stress hormones.



It is important your exercise programme is built on a foundation of corrective and functional movements. Include exercises that strengthen in the specific multi-directional and dynamic movements required by mums in their daily routine. Remember, you are lifting, walking, carrying, twisting (and often multi-tasking!) with a growing and moving load (your baby).

By maintaining fitness and feeling great, overall well-being improves. The benefits of regular exercise are compelling, to the point where all women who maintain an uncomplicated pregnancy or postnatal period are recommended to exercise most days, if not every day of the week.

TIP: Walking is a good exercise for anyone. Brisk walking gives a total body workout and is easy on the joints and muscles. If you were not active before getting pregnant, walking is a great way to start an exercise program.

TIP: Aerobics is a good way to keep your heart and lungs strong. There are even aerobics classes and postnatal bootcamps designed just for pregnant/postnatal women see www.fitfitfit.co.nz. Low-impact and water aerobics also are good exercise. Make sure your instructor is qualified to instruct pregnant and postnatal participants.

TIP: Anything that puts a strain on your joints or ligaments - such as high-impact aerobics, difficult yoga positions or jogging on the road - should be done more gently.

STRESS

In today's fast-paced world, work and personal demands on our time are unavoidable. Dealing with day-to-day stress is normal. In fact, a certain amount of stress will trigger our body's "fight-or-flight" response to give us the extra 'energy' we need to flee or defend ourselves against danger (in today's world for example, caring for a sick child or getting all the housework done before it is time to make dinner!). Too much though, (as with most things), can cause health problems.

Stress is one of three main factors contributing to the state of your health (along with physical and nutritional balance and wellbeing). It is estimated that up to 90% of visits to primary health care providers are due to stress-related ailments. The unfortunate reality is that exhausting your body will eventually (whether in the short- or long-term) respond, ultimately leading to a weakened immune system, bone loss or other serious health conditions. We learn the hard way!

Although we can neither prevent 'bad' things from happening nor forcibly change our emotional responses, we can use stress management techniques to protect us (and perhaps our baby) from some of the negative effects of stress.

Accepting the fact you are stressed and identifying the situations that produce feelings of stress are the first steps in helping to reduce it. Remember that just as 'what you eat affects your baby', so too do your stress levels and emotional health. It is important that you minimise your stress and anxiety during pregnancy (and also postnatally) to provide your baby with an optimal environment in which to grow and develop.

TIP: Try to eat a healthy well balanced diet

TIP: Rest when you can, try to get a good night's sleep or have a power-nap during the day

TIP: Exercise (consent from your LMC first)! It will help to boost energy levels

TIP: Relax by meditating, listening to music or writing in a journal

TIP: Avoid stressful people and stressful situations when possible

TIP: Talk — to your partner, friends, relatives, health care professionals, and your employer. If you feel overwhelmed, talk with a trained counsellor or other mental health professional.

TIP: Look at your work activities, home and family responsibilities and other obligations. Is this schedule sustainable?

TIP: Be prepared to give up some control over the life-style you have worked so hard to attain. Many things about pregnancy and motherhood are not controllable. You may experience severe morning sickness, fatigue or you may have a baby that doesn't settle easily. It can happen to anybody. Be prepared to accept anything that may come your way.

Life can be complex and often challenging. There are ways that you as a pregnant or postnatal women can go about evaluating the stress you are enduring and make changes in your life to better be able to deal with it. By doing so, you'll have a healthier and more enjoyable pregnancy, cope better with motherhood and be a happier person overall.

For more information on corrective exercise & wellness please don't hesitate in contacting the team at FITBumps, FITMums and FITBodies. See our website and timetables at www.fitfitfit.co.nz. Email us with any questions karina@fitfitfit.co.nz.

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