



PHYSICAL THERAPY
for WOMEN

Post Partum Physical Care



A Guideline for the First 16 Weeks

Congratulations from PT for Women!

Your newborn will need lots of love and attention and so will you. Taking care of yourself during your initial postpartum period is something that is often overlooked but is an important part of your recovery and well-being. I strongly recommend that new mamas not rush into “working out” or try to “bounce back” into shape, but instead follow the protocol that I have developed for your first 16 weeks postpartum.

The first 4 weeks postpartum is about being comfortable and managing any symptoms that may arise while giving your body time to heal and recover. (So, no jumping ahead!) We will start to get you moving in that 4-6-week period and then once your body is healed, 6-16 weeks promises to bring another increase in movement and intensity. Enjoy this special time with your newborn, but Mama, this brochure is all about *you*! Be well!

About PT for Women

Physical Therapy for Women is an intimate practice providing quality, effective care for women through all stages of life. The practice is led by physical therapist and Women’s Health Specialist (WCS) Anne Collins Duch. Anne is considered a local expert on women’s health issues including prenatal and postpartum care and pelvic health.



**Find more information about Anne and her practice
on Instagram @ptforwomen or Facebook @PT for Women**



1 Day Post Partum - 4 Weeks Post Partum

Incision Care – Whether you have had a Cesarean birth or vaginal birth, focus on keeping your stitches dry and clean, using just soap and water.

Inflammation care – Consider a gentle binder for Cesarean birth recovery for compression at the incision. This should not be worn tight – just firm enough to provide support without impeding a full belly breath. For inflammation in the seat area, you can take a hand towel and pass one end between your legs so that you are essentially straddling the towel (with your clothes on). You should pull both ends of the towel up so that you feel compression throughout your bottom from front to back. You can lie in a side-lying position while doing this or sit on a big therapy ball to provide more compression if this feels comfortable. You might consider placing a cold pack or frozen pad between your seat and the towel for even more inflammation management.



Breath Work – Establish belly breathing, where you allow your belly to rise and rib cage to expand with every inhalation and allow your belly to draw in slightly and rib cage draw down slightly with every exhalation. This should not be forceful. This breath work will allow you to establish a connection between your abdominals and your pelvic floor, which is a foundational activity to build upon when increasing your activity. Better breathing equals decreased intra-abdominal

pressure which equals decreased chance of leaking urine with activity.

Voiding and BM Management - If bladder retention or constipation is an issue, establish a voiding schedule in which you attempt to void every 2 hours in a good squat position (knees above hips with feet resting on a stool) with no pushing or bearing down. You should focus on belly breathing which helps encourage a piston action between the diaphragm muscle and the pelvic floor which, in turn, supports evacuation of bladder and bowel. Drinking plenty of water and including a wide array of fruits and veggies in your diet are important components to keeping your bowels moving regularly.

Kegel Work – Establish a gentle lift and/or a closure of pelvic floor muscles, which are often referred to as bathroom muscles. It may be that you don't feel this during your initial period of recovery. You may feel this more effective by applying pressure with your hand (i.e. splinting) or with the towel sling (see inflammation care above) at your vaginal opening while attempting to engage those muscles. This Kegel activation should be practiced once or twice per day for 5 repetitions. This should not be practiced by trying to stop the flow of urine while voiding. It is important to note the letting go of the Kegel contraction after the activation, as the excursion of the muscles turning on and turning off are of equal importance.



Passive Chest Opening / Mama Tummy Time

– Lie over a big ball or an ottoman with arms outstretched in a “T” position allowing the chest to open gently. This helps to promote positioning that is in opposition of where you spend most of your day with child childcare (i.e., folded forward or leaning over). You can also lie on the floor on your belly with elbows right under your shoulders. Encourage long

steady breaths, allowing the rib cage to expand on the inhale and draw down and in on the exhale.

Lifting / Baby Care – You should keep baby (and all the stuff that goes with baby) as close to the mid-line of your body as possible while lifting, being mindful to exhale on exertion. (i.e., When lifting a car seat, inhale while reaching down to grasp the handle and exhale as the car seat is being lifted.) This is super important as you increase activity and begin to get out of the house. You will most likely be carrying more than 20lbs with you everywhere you go, between your baby and your baby care items. This makes your ability to lift without holding your breath paramount in managing the pressure within your belly, so as to decrease its effect on the thinned cartilage of your belly (diastasis recti) or your weakened pelvic floor muscles.



4 - 6 Weeks Post Partum

- Continue with **breath work** as noted previously. At this point, you may be able to coordinate your breath with your Kegel contractions so that you are activating the pelvic floor muscles (i.e. lift and/or close) on the exhalation of your breath.
- Introduce **walking**, making sure to change up your mode for transporting your baby on occasion. That is, sometimes push your baby in a stroller, sometimes wear your baby in a carrier, and sometimes carry your baby. When you can, change up your terrain as well.



- Introduce **squats** with breath work – inhaling while lowering down and exhaling while returning to a standing position. Increase intensity (weight) and duration (number of repetitions) slowly.
- Initiate gentle **yoga / stretching** to counter forward flexed positions. Spend some time lying on your belly daily.
- Continue **Kegel** training, practicing a couple gentle holds (3 seconds) and quick squeezes (5 reps) once or twice a day.
- In the absence of any complications, your C-birth or pelvic floor incision is well-healed and is ready to be mobilized. Applying pressure to the scar using the index and middle finger of each hand, perform small circles along its entire length and back again. Repeat several times, pausing over the areas that feel less movable. This should be done daily for 5 minutes for 2 – 3 weeks.



6 Weeks Post Partum - 16 Weeks Post Partum

6-week Clearance - After you have been cleared by your care provider at your 6-week postpartum check-up, start to think about how you can scale up your exercise program going forward. The 6-week postpartum mark is simply a measure to indicate that you are healed. It is not a measure that your system is ready to be loaded to the degree that it was prior to you giving birth. It will require a slow increase in the load of your exercise. Pain, leaking of urine, or doming of your diastasis during a specific exercise are all indicators that that exercise needs to be scaled up more slowly or done in a different way.

Abdominals - Continue with your breath work and focus on engaging your abdominals without gripping your belly. Try this by gently drawing down your bottom rib toward your hip points during your exhalation. You will feel a gentle, sub-maximal contraction of your abdominal muscles. Release that contraction and allow your belly to expand when you inhale. Repeat this a handful of times several times per day.



Running - When getting back to running, do so by alternating walk / jog intervals for time. This means that your first several sessions may be 5-10 minutes in length, jogging for 30 seconds, followed by walking for 1 minute and so on, for the amount of time that you are running. Allow the increase in the jog time to be dictated by how your pelvis feels and any symptoms (i.e. leaking of urine) you may encounter.

Yoga - When returning to a regular yoga practice, do so with a curious spirit, focusing on breath work and modifications with the help of your teacher. The asana should not contribute to doming of your abdominal wall or heaviness in your pelvic floor. If it does, modify as appropriate. (i.e., lower your knees if in a plank or take a slight bend in your knees in a forward fold).

Cross Fit – Avoid reps for time (AMRAPs) and instead focus on form and breath work for several weeks, modifying each and every exercise that contributes to diastasis doming, pain, or leaking.



Strength Training – In a return to weight lifting, start with lighter weights making breath work your focus scale up from there, again allowing symptoms to be your guide on how quickly you can increase your weight. Synchronize breath work so that exhale is happening during your lift.

Other considerations:

If you are experiencing pain with intercourse, leaking of urine, difficulty holding back gas, or abdominal separation during the months following the birth of your baby, consider making an appointment with a women's health physical therapy specialist at Physical Therapy for Women. While these symptoms are not a reason to panic, they are an indication that your system could use a little help moving in the right direction.

Contact us by going to www.pt-women.com to set up your appointment.

Or, join us for a Mama Baby Boot Camp Class, an eclectic exercise class that incorporates yoga, resistive training, and cardio activity - all with a rehab slant. Bring your baby and have some fun, while getting yourself up and running again.

Wellness Services

In addition to Post Partum care, PT for Women offers a number of services designed to help patients improve and maintain their health.



Fit Moms

This prenatal fitness class is a unique blend of cardiovascular, resistive training, yoga, and childbirth education. It focuses on overall well-being throughout the progression of your pregnancy while emphasizing the primary muscles groups essential for delivery and postpartum recovery.

Mama Baby Boot Camp

This postpartum class is a perfect place to restart or initiate a fitness regimen after baby has arrived. Bring your baby and get a sweat on while being led through a safe and effective exercise program designed to address the areas of your body that have been challenged by your pregnancy and delivery.

Vinyasa Yoga

This is a yoga class that cultivates presence by synchronizing poses with breath. Vinyasa yoga helps to release toxins and recharge your body, as well as relieve any mental clutter.

Zip Up Your Abs – Monthly Diastasis Recti Seminar

Diastasis recti is a common condition experienced by women during their childbearing years. Please join Anne Collins Duch, board certified women's health specialist in physical therapy and MUTU Pro, for a session on how to address diastasis recti.



PHYSICAL THERAPY
for WOMEN

1601 Concord Pike • Independence Mall • Suite 34
Wilmington, DE 19803
Located in Sadhana Yoga Studio

(302) 229-5021

pt-women@comcast.net • www.pt-women.com