



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FAQ131

LABOR, DELIVERY, AND POSTPARTUM CARE

## Getting in Shape After Your Baby Is Born

- **What are the benefits of exercising after having a baby?**
- **When can I start exercising after having a baby?**
- **How do I get started with an exercise program?**
- **When should I add exercises besides walking?**
- **What resources are available?**
- **What are some basic tips for staying cool and comfortable while exercising?**
- **How can I warm up before exercising?**
- **What is my target heart rate?**
- **How can I cool down?**

### **What are the benefits of exercising after having a baby?**

Daily exercise can help restore muscle strength and firm up your body. Exercise can make you less tired because it raises your energy level and improves your sense of well-being.

During pregnancy, the muscles in your abdomen stretch. It takes time for good muscle tone to return. Exercising helps tighten these muscles.

### **When can I start exercising after having a baby?**

Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program. You should start when you feel up to it and know you will keep it up. Follow the same guidelines as you did when you were pregnant. If you had a cesarean birth, a difficult birth, or complications, it may take a little while longer to feel ready to start exercising.

If you did not exercise during pregnancy, start with easy exercises and slowly build up to harder ones. If you exercised regularly throughout pregnancy, you have a head start. You should not try to resume your former pace right away, though.

### **How do I get started with an exercise program?**

Walking is a good way to get back in shape. Brisk walks will prepare you for more vigorous exercise when you feel up to it. Walking is a good choice for exercise because the only thing you need is a pair of comfortable shoes. It is free, and you can do it almost any place or time.

Walking also is good because your baby can come along. The two of you can get out of the house for exercise and fresh air without needing to find child care. Seeing other people and being outside can help relieve stress and tension.

### **When should I add exercises besides walking?**

As you feel stronger, think about trying more vigorous exercise. You will want to decide on exercises that meet your needs. A good program will make your heart and lungs stronger and tone your muscles.

There are special postpartum exercise classes that you can join. Your health care provider can help you find some good classes.

### **What resources are available?**

Resources that may be helpful are local health and fitness clubs, community centers, local colleges, hospitals, and adult education programs. With any program you get involved in, make sure it is one you will keep doing. Exercise over time is more important than starting right away after birth.

## What are some basic tips for staying cool and comfortable while exercising?

- Wear comfortable clothing that will help keep you cool.
- Wear a bra that fits well and gives plenty of support to help protect your breasts.
- Drink plenty of water.

## How can I warm up before exercising?

Before you begin each exercise session, always warm up for 5–10 minutes. This light activity, such as slow walking, prepares your muscles for exercise. As you warm up, stretch your muscles to avoid injury. Hold each stretch for 10–20 seconds—do not bounce.

## What is my target heart rate?

You should exercise so that your heart beats at the level that gives you the best workout. This is called your target heart rate. Your target heart rate is 50–85% of the average maximum heart rate for your age.

To check your heart rate, count the beats by feeling the pulse on the inside of your wrist. Count for 10 seconds. Multiply this count by 6 to get the number of beats per minute.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Target heart rate (beats per minute)</b>	<b>Average maximum heart rate (beats per minute)</b>
20	100–170	200
25	98–165	195
30	95–162	190
35	93–157	185
40	90–153	180
45	88–149	175
50	85–145	170
55	83–140	165
60	80–136	160
65	78–132	155
70	75–128	150

When you begin your exercise program, aim for the lower range of your target heart rate (50% of your maximum heart rate). As you get into better shape, slowly build up to the higher end of your target heart rate. After 6 months of exercise, you should be able to exercise at up to 85% of your maximum heart rate. But you do not need to exercise at 85% of your maximum heart rate to stay fit. You should aim to exercise about 20–30 minutes while in your target heart rate.

## How can I cool down?

After exercising, cool down by slowing your activity. Cooling down allows your heart rate to return to normal levels. Cooling down for 5–10 minutes, followed by stretching, also helps prevent sore muscles.

## If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

**FAQ131:** Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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