

Modifications for Postnatal Yoga

*Always seek medical advice first if you are concerned about your health.

The most important postnatal advice

Be kind to yourself, sleep, eat nutritious food, have good posture, find a community of other mothers; this could be at Mother and Baby Yoga, the Children's Centre, family and friends or other baby groups. A community of supportive and strong women can be invaluable during this time of change.

When can I start?

- If your birth experience was uncomplicated, 6 weeks after the birth.
- If there were complications/ interventions during the birth, please wait until you are 12 weeks postnatal before coming to class.
- Please wait until the lochia (postnatal bloody discharge) has stopped. The more you rest, the lighter the lochia will become.
- Please wait until you have healed from any birth trauma.

How long should I keep practising postnatal yoga?

- You can continue coming to Mum and Baby Yoga classes until your baby is crawling. However, you can continue to practise postnatal yoga for as long as it feels right for your body; my postnatal yoga classes are all about strengthening the deep muscles, which become weak during pregnancy, body awareness, posture and helping to restore balance, physically, mentally and emotionally. If you are interested in postnatal yoga but your baby is crawling, contact me about arranging a 1:1 session.

Pelvic Floor Exercises

This area might feel sore postnatally but any small tears, grazes or bruises should heal quickly. More severe tears or an episiotomy might take longer to heal; avoid class until this has healed. Relaxation, cold gel packs and light pelvic floor work may reduce swelling and help to speed up the healing process.

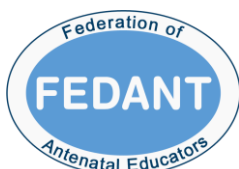
The pelvic floor muscles:

- Support the internal organs
- Maintain urinary and bowel continence
- Support sexual functioning
- Bolster the organs during activities that stress them physically, such as laughing, sneezing and coughing.

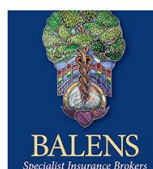
The great thing about pelvic floor exercises is that they can be done at almost any time. Try doing a few every time you change a nappy or every time you feed.

Avoid anything that puts too much pressure on the pelvic floor; postnatal yoga can help with teaching you exercises that support this.

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Posture, posture, posture!

Pregnancy causes postural changes. It can take time, postnatally to bring your posture back to neutral alignment. Postnatal yoga can help.

Stretching these areas can alleviate tension:

- The hip flexors
- The lower back/ upper buttocks
- The quadriceps
- The chest muscles
- The internal rotators and elevators of the shoulders
- The back of the neck

. Strengthening these areas can help to support the body:

- The gluteus maximus
- The hamstrings
- The abdominals
- The lower trapezius (mid-back)
- The external rotators of the shoulders
- The pelvic floor muscles
- The intercostal muscles (muscles between the ribs)

Adopt the neutral spine position as much as possible, particularly during core strength and stability exercises.

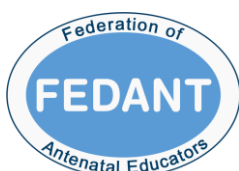
Handy Hints

- Consider your positioning when feeding your baby; avoid leaning forward over baby. Try to keep your chest open, back supported and shoulders relaxed. Placing a pillow on your lap for baby to lie on can help with this, as well as ensuring you have an appropriate chair or cushions behind your back.
- To do low-level jobs, kneel or squat; avoid bending forwards. You can put padding under your knees if you are experiencing knee pain.
- Change nappies on a raised surface (ensuring baby is safe at all times).
- Always be conscious of keeping neutral spinal alignment, for example when pushing your buggy or wearing your baby.

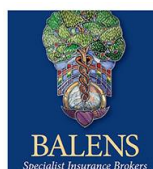
Hydration

Staying hydrated is vital during this time. Avoid caffeine, which will dehydrate you further.

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Knee Pain

During pregnancy, the pelvis widens and it can remain so for a little while postnatally. The angle from the pelvis to the knees changes, which can cause pain in the knee joints. Knee pain can also be caused by hormones that cause the ligaments to loosen; strengthening muscles around the knee can support this.

Handy Hints:

- The knee is a hinge joint. Only move it backwards and forwards.
- Use props to support the knees, for example, during baddha konasana (cobbler's pose) place blocks under the knees.
- In kneeling positions, place blankets under the knees.
- Strengthen the muscles around the knee joints.
- Keep the feet, knees and hips aligned.

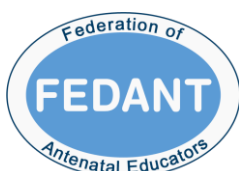
Diastasis Recti: separation of the abdominal muscles

During pregnancy, abdominal muscles need to stretch to accommodate your growing baby. There is a line of connective tissue that runs vertically up the centre of your body, connecting your rectus abdominis. It is normal for this connective tissue to stretch a little bit but if it stretches too much it can be problematic. Ensure you talk to a medical professional about this if you have concerns and you can be referred to a physiotherapist.

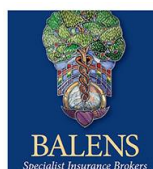
Handy Hints:

- Keep movements small to strengthen the rectus abdominis muscles, which are small. If the moves become bigger, you will engage larger muscles.
- No curls or crunches! This kind of movement adds pressure to the abdominal area and the pelvic floor because there is nowhere for your organs to go. In my Mum and Baby yoga class I can show you appropriate abdominal exercises.
- At first, you might not feel any sensation when doing these small movements. Have faith and stick with it. Eventually, as you work these muscles, they will become stronger and you will gain more awareness.

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Fatigue

General Hints

Your body has been through many changes; you have created a human being! On top of that, caring for your baby can be an exhausting job. Be kind to yourself and rest when you can. Do not feel guilty for resting when your baby is sleeping; it will give you more energy to be a great mum when baby wakes up.

Hints in Class

In class, take the gentler options. Your body needs energy to heal so don't use it all up doing squats! If you are feeling particularly tired, let me know at the beginning of class and I will ensure I weave in plenty of restorative postures.

The Adrenal Glands

Lack of sleep and possible anxiety can lead to some new mothers experiencing raised cortisol levels; for a short time cortisol is a useful hormone, however, sustained high levels can have negative effects emotionally and physically. If you are feeling particularly stressed, depressed or anxious, speak to a medical professional.

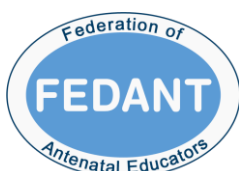
Handy Hints if you're feeling over-stimulated

- Only do gentle, restorative exercise; more tiring exercise will stimulate the sympathetic nervous system.
- Engage the parasympathetic nervous system through calming activities. This releases hormones that will help you to feel calm. We work on this in my Mum and Baby yoga classes.
- You might like to consider a 1:1 session or at-home yoga if it is difficult to get out of the house to a class.

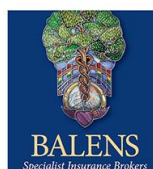
Hot sweats/flushes

When the mother's milk 'comes in,' the hormone *prolactin* increases, which causes the body's temperature to rise.

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Caesarean Section

- If you had a Caesarean section, wait until you are 12 weeks postnatal and your scar has healed before coming to postnatal yoga. Remember to keep your wound clean and wear loose comfortable clothing. If you have any sign of infection, such as discharge or an unpleasant smell, speak to your medical professional. Rest as much as possible so you can heal; looking after your baby is enough movement for your body in the first few months after a Caesarean section.

Handy Hints

- Work on posture.
- Avoid deep spinal twists.
- Avoid abdominal curls.
- Avoid anything that puts pressure on the abdomen, such as plank pose.
- Avoid deep back bends.
- Focus on light activation of the abdominal muscles, with the spine in a neutral position.
- Mobilise and stretch the neck, shoulders, glutes and lower back area.

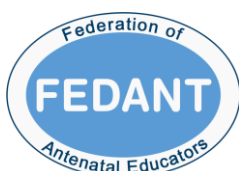
Connective Tissue and Ligaments

Pregnancy hormones stimulate lengthening and laxity in the ligaments and other connective tissues. Postnatally, there will still be some relaxin in your system. For this reason, it is important not to over-stretch because you might find you are stretching the ligaments/connective tissue instead of the muscles.

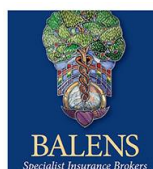
After Pains

You might feel after pains as the uterus begins to contract; some women feel this during breastfeeding (due to the release of oxytocin). The sensation is similar to mild labour contractions. Keep in mind that this is a good kind of pain...it means your body is healing.

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