

What you need  
to know to  
*safely & intelligently re-build  
your fitness foundations postpartum*



A guide to help you  
take the guesswork  
out of returning  
to fitness postpartum



## About me! Who am I?!

Hey, I'm Nikki - Mum of soon-to-be two kids, Certified Pre and Post-Natal Fitness Specialist, Personal Trainer, Body Ready Method Certified Pro, Pelacore Instructor and Founder of the Babes 'n Bellies Bootcamp and the Mum, Babes 'n Bods Bootcamp.

I work with pregnant and postpartum women to help educate and train them for birth, and then help ease them back to their favourite activities postpartum.

Since having my son, and spontaneously going into labour prematurely, I have a passion for helping women with pelvic floor and core health to help train and give them the tools to have an empowered pregnancy and postpartum recovery.

When my water broke 6-weeks early at 2 am in September 2019, I was terrified. But because I had thankfully trained for labour and done the research, I knew exactly what I wanted and was fortunate experience a birth that was very close to what I had hoped for.

I am not telling you this to brag. I am telling you this because I want to prevent women from ever saying "I wish someone I told me."

Today, I teach new moms how to stay active during pregnancy and ease back into fitness postpartum, and let me tell you it doesn't have to be all about just sitting there doing kegels!

With love & fitness,

*Nikki*

Nikki Johnston

Founder of the [Babes 'n Bellies Bootcamp](#) & [Mums, Babes 'n Bods Bootcamp](#)

# Mum, Babes 'n Bods

## Pelvic Core Method

### MY POSTPARTUM JOURNEY



THIS WAS ME ABOUT 1 WEEK POSTPARTUM. BUT I'D SAY IT TOOK ME AT LEAST 6 MONTHS TO FEEL COMFORTABLE IN MY BODY AGAIN, AND AT LEAST ANOTHER 3-5 MONTHS TO FEEL LIKE I GAINED MY STRENGTH BACK. HERE ARE SOME THINGS I DID TO HELP ME GET THERE:

- Within 24 hours of birth, I started doing "the core breath", aka diaphragmatic breath with kegels and deep core engagement. [Here is a link to a video to show you how to do this.](#)
- Within week 1-2, I started doing very gentle deep core activation while lying down in bed. We're talking knee drops and heel slides, not ab crunches. [Here is a video of one of my Transverse Ab routines for the immediate postpartum period.](#)
- I still took it really easy the first couple of weeks, especially because my son was in the NICU. Once we got home after 3 weeks in the hospital, I started going for 15-20 minute walks in the woods. I always watched to make sure my lochia (postpartum bleeding) was not getting any worse. This is a key indicator from your body!
- I did some light stretching and yoga, especially because my upper back was so sore from breastfeeding and carrying the baby! Keeping mobility in the upper body is key!
- At about 7-8 weeks post, I started going to local Mom & Baby Fitness classes, and I definitely went too far too fast. The instructor gave modifications, but my ego got in the way, and I over did it. I also started running again between 3-4 months post. That was also a bit much. After seeing my pelvic floor physio, she told me I had stage 1 bladder prolapse. I had to work on my pelvic floor tone.
- After this experience of one step forward, one step back, I decided I needed to share what I learned and create a program to help other women bridge the gap between birth, physio and returning to fitness classes and higher impact activities. Hence the **Mum, Babes 'n Bods Bootcamp** was born.

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# *Mum, Babes 'n Bods*

## *Pelvic Core Method*

### 4TH TRIMESTER HEALING & RECOVERY

#### **So what can I do 0-3 months post?!**

I don't believe in doing nothing for 40 days, but I also don't believe in jumping back into pre-pregnancy activities either - even activities you were doing at 34 weeks of pregnancy - you've got to dial it down.

If you are 0-6 weeks post, and would like some guidance on what to do for the time being, this is what I recommend:

#### **The 5-5-5 protocol & then the Daily 7**

- you rest 5 days in bed, rest 5 days near the bed, and rest 5 days in the house; this isn't a strict thing - nut just a guideline of activity levels for the first 15 days.
- spend the first few weeks in and then near the bed resting. This helps the body to recover from the birthing process and pregnancy. It also helps with baby bonding and can be beneficial to a client who is learning how to breastfeed.
- During this time, do the Daily 7

#### **The Daily 7**

These exercises can be done from bed or from the bedroom - they can honestly be done anywhere (sitting on a toilet, in a car, waiting for an appointment, in the kitchen, outside, anywhere!

**Check out the Daily 7 on the next page!**

#### **Postpartum Depression/Anxiety**

It is estimated that about one in seven postpartum people suffer from perinatal mood disorders. Some of the warning signs that require medical attention include, but are not limited to

- Sudden change in sleep, appetite or energy levels
- Indifference or fear of harming the baby or oneself
- Anxiety revolving around the baby or increased general anxiety
- Extreme sadness

If you are experiencing any of these feelings, feel free to reach out to me, a counsellor specializing in perinatal support, such as Illuminate Counselling, OR please contact the Pacific Post Partum Support Society for support: <https://postpartum.org/> OR visit Postpartum Support International: <https://www.postpartum.net/> .

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# Mum, Babes 'n Bods Pelvic Core Method

## THE DAILY 7 MOVEMENTS



Quadruped Candles



Supine Chest Opener



Side Stretch



Lying Down Side Stretch



Psoas Release



Hip Hinge



Calf Stretch

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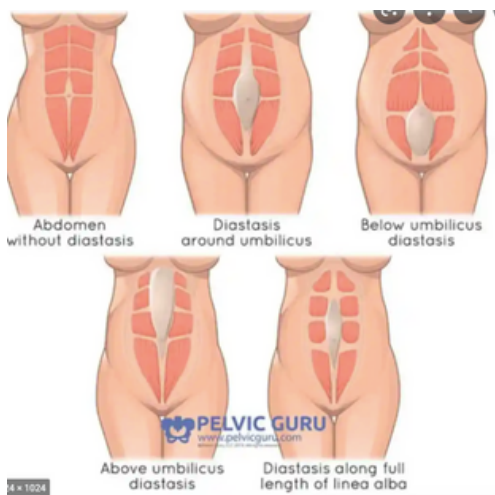
## COMMON POSTPARTUM CONCERNS

### What is Diastasis Recti?

Diastasis Recti (DR), also known as abdominal separation, is the separation of the rectus abdominus (RA), or "six-pack muscles", due to laxity in the linea alba, or the connective tissue between the RA. [Click here for a short video on how to check yourself for DR.](#)

It's extremely common to have some level of DR postpartum - nearly 100% of women will get it at some point during their pregnancy, or even from the pushing stage of labour! So you are not allowed to feel guilty about it, and wish you had done something differently.

Here is a diagram showing different types or locations of DR:



There is some debate in the post-natal fitness industry as to whether a DR will even ever fully heal itself, but we do know that the most spontaneous healing of tissues happens by about 8-12 weeks postpartum. It is also important to remember that you can eventually regain a fully functional core, even with some degree of abdominal separation.

If you are eventually able to [generate tension in the linea alba through the pelvic core "wrap"](#), then you will be able to control any doming or coning that you might experience. So **DON'T GET HUNG UP ON THE GAP!!!** The correct core routines will help you be able to re-connect to your pelvic floor and Transverse Abdominis, and eventually regain strength in your RA or six-pack muscles. You don't want to be doing gentle activation work like heel slides or knee drops forever! The tissues need to be gradually and safely loaded over time to regain strength.

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## WHAT CAN I DO RECOVER FROM MY C-SECTION?

If you are recovering from a cesarean birth, here are some tips on how to best recover and promote optimal healing:

- Wear your Ab Tank and Wrap as soon as possible in an upward lift motion that gently lifts the belly away from the incision. This will provide support to the incision, help the connective tissues heal and encourage the abdominal muscles to re-align.
- You can also look into "recovery shorts" - they can provide support to both the core and the pelvic floor at the same time.
- Remember, it is a myth that only those who have had a vaginal birth need pelvic floor support. Pregnancy puts a lot of stress on the pelvic floor regardless of the type of birth - see a pelvic floor physio, and start your "core breath" as soon as 24 hours postpartum.
- Rest and hydration are essential. Ask your family for help getting in and out of bed, walking to the washroom, getting on and off the toilet and getting back into bed.
- Again - resting is important for post operative recovery. Rest is also important for postpartum recovery. If you have had a cesarean, you need double rest! Seek help from family, friends and whoever else can offer it for the first 6 weeks.
- Whenever you need to move, have someone assist you. Do a core breath - inhale to expand, exhale to engage and then roll to your side. Take another breath in, exhale to engage your pelvic floor, and then with assistance use your arms to push yourself up while your assistant helps pull you up and move your legs over the side of the bed.
- I re-iterate: roll to the side when getting up! Rolling to the side puts less pressure on the scar and is also a healthy core practice. When you roll to your side, push up with your arm/hand to support the core and body in this move.
- Place your hands over your incision to support the area while you move. You should spend as little time as possible on your feet for the first week - this will reduce the effect of gravity on the sutures, on the pelvic floor and on the weak muscles and connective tissue. Don't rush. Take the time to heal.
- You can also try holding a pillow over the incision: sudden jolting movements can cause a sharp pain in the incision if it is not supported well! Holding a pillow or something soft on the belly while coughing laughing or sneezing will lessen the impact and can help mitigate pain.
- Do not lift anything heavier than your baby for the first few weeks. Heavy lifting and straining can damage weakened muscles and connective tissue as they are healing. Have family bring the baby to you for breastfeeding and cuddle time.
- Gentle point/flex/circle movements of the foot and ankle can be done throughout the day while in bed to encourage blood flow, help reduce swelling, remove toxins and minimize the risk of infection.

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## WHAT CAN I DO RECOVER FROM MY C-SECTION?

- Start gentle pelvic floor exercises with restorative breathing within the first few days to encourage maximum oxygen delivery to your recovering core.
- Skin brushing encourages movement of fluids in the body, which can help reduce swelling. Using a soft bristle brush, gently stroke from your inner thigh upwards toward your heart – this can begin about 2 days postpartum and can be done several times daily.
- Scar tissue mobilization is important to prevent adhesions from building up in all of those layers of incision points. Adhesions can lead to decreased mobility and impaired core function. See a pelvic floor physiotherapist for assistance and then practice daily at home.
- The 6-week mark has generally been the 'return to activity' golden date, but really there is no set date and it certainly is NOT at 6 weeks. Everyone heals differently. By 6-weeks you should be able to walk more freely, but vigorous activity, heavy lifting and high impact movements are off limits (this is true for those who had a vaginal birth too). The focus remains on core restoration – because if the foundation is not restored, you will prevent proper healing of diastasis recti and increase the likelihood of suffering from incontinence and organ prolapse.
- Crunches are off limits! They encourage a pooch, they create pressure on the pelvic floor and they promote a c-shape posture which is the last thing a breastfeeding mom needs!

### **Give Yourself Time**

The postpartum period can be a frustrating time for women. Many of them want to jump right back into their former activities as soon as possible. They are joining boot camps and cross-fit. They are thinking it is a good time to run a marathon. They haven't even given their body time to heal and with the core not working properly, they are adding loads onto weak muscles. The best advice: take time to heal gradually. And you can achieve the postpartum body you want, just not overnight

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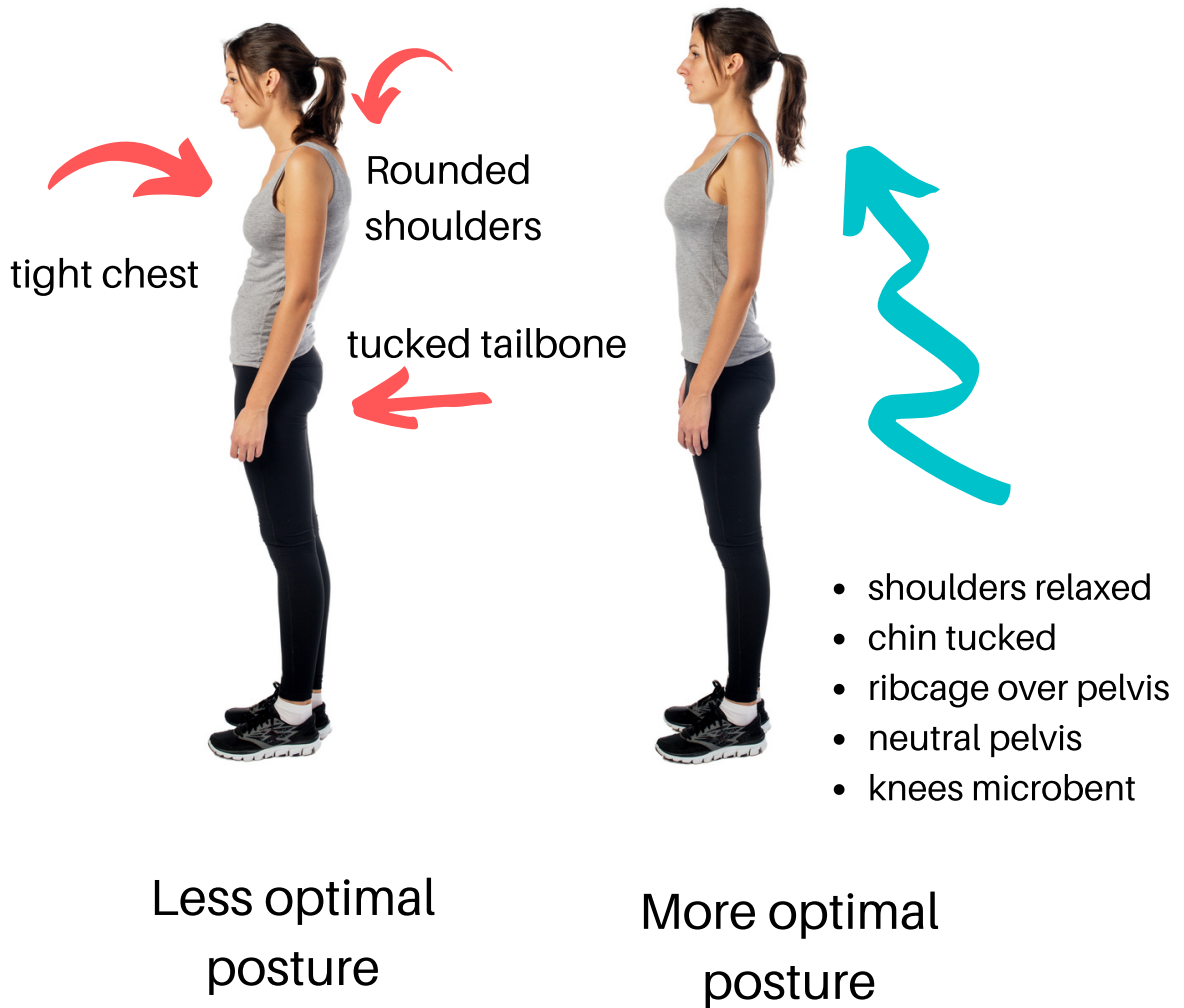


## POSTPARTUM POSTURE & ALIGNMENT TO OPTIMIZE YOUR PELVIC CORE

It's also worth remembering that what you do throughout the day; how you stand, walk, sit, and even poop, has an impact on how your core functions and your postpartum recovery!

So even if you aren't working out, being mindful of how you stand and sit throughout the day can actually really help you optimize how your deep core functions and restore your core.

Alignment is a tool and not a rule, so don't be obsessed, but being mindful is helpful!



For more information & resources, follow Nikki on IG [@seatoskyfitness](https://www.instagram.com/seatoskyfitness).