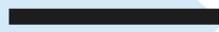


MUMEHOOD

**Returning to running
safely post birth**



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Returning to running safely post-birth

Running is becoming more and more popular, particularly amongst postnatal women. It's appeal is understandable, running has the benefits of efficient physical fitness, a leaner body composition, and a chance to get some well-earned headspace or socialize.

Pregnancy and childbirth weaken a woman's internal and external muscles. Running is high impact, requires strength, coordination and places a lot of demand on the body. To be run ready, a woman's body needs time to heal and regain its strength after having a baby in order to reduce the risk of injury.

Often for litigation purposes, the 6-week postnatal milestone is one that serves as a tick box confirming readiness and suitability to return to exercise, including running. The healing process, however, extends well beyond this. Research indicates that the pelvic floor can take up to 4-6 months to heal, and if you have had a c section it is likely that your abdominal muscles, still at 6-7 months are only 73-93% healed. With this in mind, the 6 week 'milestone' is not adequate time to presume a woman is run ready, it is simply not enough time to heal and regain strength. Therefore, returning to running with guidance, rehab and more time is essential.

March 2019 saw the release of the first ever UK guidelines to specifically offer evidence based recommendations for postnatal women returning to running - "Returning to running postnatal - guidelines for medical, health and fitness professionals managing this population" (Goom, Donnelly & Brockwell 2019).

Check out the full guidelines [here](#).

Brockwell, Donnelly and Goom recommend following an initial low impact exercises timeline followed by return to running between 3-6 months postnatal. They also recommended that all women, regardless of how they deliver, seek out a pelvic health assessment with a specialist physiotherapist to evaluate strength, function and coordination of the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles which are often impacted by pregnancy and delivery.

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The importance of getting referral to a pelvic health physiotherapist is further highlighted if any of the following signs and symptoms are experienced prior to, or after attempting, return to running and until these are addressed it is recommended that high impact is avoided until rehabilitated:

- Heaviness/ dragging in the pelvic area.
- Leaking urine or inability to control bowel movements.
- Pendular abdomen or noticeable gap along the midline of your abdominal wall. (This may indicate Diastasis Rectus Abdominis (DRA))
- Pelvic or lower back pain.
- Ongoing or increased blood loss beyond 8 weeks postnatal that is not linked to your monthly cycle.

'5 top tips' for getting back into running postnatally

1. Do your pelvic floor exercises every day, aim to make this a daily habit, perhaps when you are brushing your teeth.
2. Cross train – Just because you are not run ready does not mean that you can not challenge your cardiovascular system! Cycling, swimming, stairmill, hill walking are all excellent forms of CVS exercise that can improve your fitness, give you a 'buzz' and are low impact, therefore stressing your body less. All runners should continue to have cross training as part of their run program when they have fully returned to running.
3. Strength training. All runners need to incorporate strength training into their running program because it helps reduce injury and can improve performance. Start with low impact, body weight exercises like squats and bridges.
4. Stretch - new mums in particular spend a lot of time in similar postures. Postnatal mums are often tight in their thoracic (middle spine) area and feet, two essential areas that need to move well for running, so stretching these areas little and often throughout the day is really very important.
5. Return to running slowly. We recommend carry out a 0-5km program to ensure that your body adapts to running effectively. Ideally the program should run over a 7-9 week period. If at anytime you experience any of the symptoms detailed earlier, stop and if you haven't already, seek the advice of a pelvic health physiotherapist.

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Mumhood has consulted with Emma Brockwell who co-authored the guidelines to bring you a Return to Running Rehab programme called “Mums on the Run”.

This is a 12 week programme consisting of postnatal specific rehab exercises and strength and conditioning work, which sits alongside the Couch to 5k app, to help get you back into (or just into) running from a minimum of 3 months post birth. The programme can be purchased on mum-hood.com for just £60.

