Postpartum Running

As one of the most popular activities in the United States, over 60 million people exercise by running each year, and over 60% of those runners are women. Running is a crucial part of many lives, but many changes can occur for women's workouts after giving birth.

Giving birth may weaken the pelvic floor and it takes time and work to regain your strength. Pelvic floor dysfunction is very common with post-partum women and can present as urinary and/or fecal incontinence or urgency, heaviness/pressure in the pelvic area, pain with intercourse, and pelvic or lower back pain. If you have any of these issues, then it's important to seek out the help of a medical provider, especially prior to returning to your pre-pregnancy exercise routine.

Running can put a lot of strain on the body, most of it sent straight to your pelvic floor. In a weakened state post-partum, this strain can increase your risk of pelvic floor dysfunction, so it's important to take the right steps for a safe return to running.

What is different for post-partum runners?

Foot and Ankle pain

It is common for feet to expand during pregnancy which stretches the ligaments that support your feet. This may lead to decreased arch support, effecting your gait, and putting extra strain on the feet, knees, hips, and spine in post-partum running. Lose ligaments in the ankles can also leave you feeling less stable while running. By investing in a good pair of sneakers that supports your arch and grips your heel firmly, you can decrease the likelihood of pain when running.

Abdominal and pelvic floor weakness

Abdominal muscle and pelvic floor weakness not only effect your core stability and endurance, they can also lead you to experience urinary leakage or pelvic organ prolapse (dropping of the bladder or uterus) with running. Postpartum exercise is a great way to prevent pain, strengthen your core, boost energy, promote sleep and reduce your stress. But you need to give your body time before adding this workout.

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Everybody is different, but typically 3-6 months post-partum should be an adequate amount of time for recovery. Give this quick work out a try to test your body's ability to return to running.

- Walking 30 minutes
- Single leg balance 10 seconds
- Single leg squat 10 repetitions each side
- Jog on the spot 1 minute
- Hop in place 10 repetitions each leg
- Side lying hip abduction.

Even if you feel confident for a run, it is still important to recognize symptoms associated with an issue. Difficulty holding urine or a heaviness or pressure in the vaginal area during or after your run may indicate that you need additional resources in order to gain full control and strength while running.

A great way to ease back into your old running program is to start going for walks and add a minute of jogging at a time. Try this couch to 5k program, it is a great way to slowly increase your speed and get your postpartum body used to this high impact activity.

Keep the following in mind for a safe and comfortable transition.
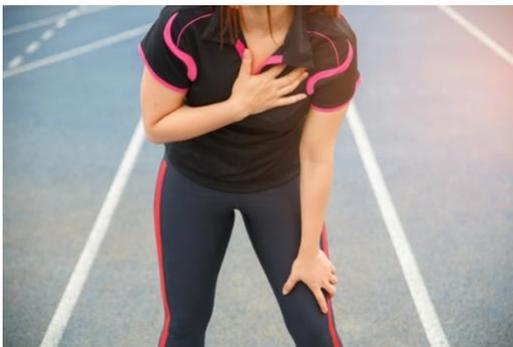
Breast pain

Many women will breastfeed between 6 months and 2 years postpartum. Swollen or engorged breasts are especially uncomfortable while running. Expressing your breastmilk or feeding your infant prior to a run and investing in a personally fitted sports bra can help increase your comfort while running.

Breathing

Stay at a pace that you can comfortably keep a conversation going, this will help you focus on your breath control and get your body adjusted to keep up with your new workouts.
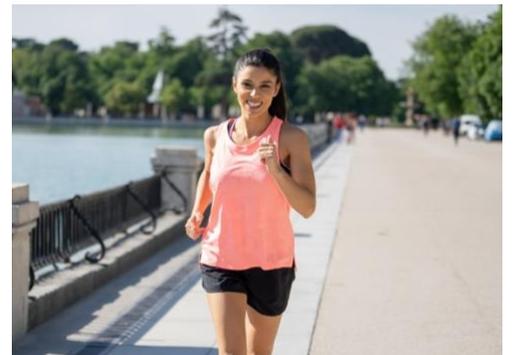
Sleep

Sleeping with an infant at home can be a struggle but sleep deprivation in athletes can increase your risk of an injury. Everyone should aim to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night, but if you are up many times over the night, try taking daytime naps and optimize your time in bed, create a relaxing routine by limiting your screen time, avoid caffeine, and creating a cool, comfortable sleep environment.

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