

Working Your Way Back to Terrific Shape After a Pregnancy

Once your pregnancy is over and done with, your baby is happily in your arms, and you're headed back home from the hospital, you'll begin to realize that things have only just begun.

Over the next few days, weeks, and months, you're going to increasingly notice that your entire life has changed in more ways than you could ever imagine. For some, this can be a very daunting process, and it may take time for you to get used to it.

But aside from all the changes to your life as a whole, you no doubt will want one thing to go back to being the way it was: Your body!

During your pregnancy, you would have undoubtedly gained some weight – that much is natural. Now that it is over however, you'll probably want to go back to being able to fit into your favorite pair of jeans.

Very quickly, you'll find that this is easier said than done. Sure, it takes effort, but you probably expected that. What you may not have fully accounted for though is the fact that now, with a newborn in your life, it isn't that easy to get back into shape quickly!

Don't get disheartened. Although it might not be entirely as easy as you expected, you can definitely get back into terrific shape. In fact, you may find that you're even able to be in better shape than you were before your pregnancy.

All in all, it is simply about the approach you use.

This guide is going to be your handbook to achieving the ideal weight that you desire. As you leaf through these pages, you're going to find all the know-how that you'll need to shave off those pounds, and trim your body down to the size that you desire.

More than that though – it isn't just going to be the same old regular weight loss program that everyone knows. Instead, this guide is going to tailor the ideal weight loss program to the needs of a new mother – you!

In other words, everything that you learn from this point on is going to cater specifically to the very unique needs of women who have a newborn in their life.

Right now, before we jump into the actual weight loss portion of this guide though, there are a few things that you should know to start off with. Some of these, you may already be familiar with, but it is going to be worthwhile going over them anyway.

Think of this as the foundation for the approach that we're going to be guiding you through.

Weight Gain and Pregnancy 101

Okay so it is safe to say that everyone knows that it is normal to gain some weight during pregnancy. After all, you are carrying a whole entire new life within your body, and so that's bound to weigh you down.

But what many people don't realize is that depending on a variety of factors, you may find yourself gaining more weight, or less weight.

Generally speaking, the weight that you do gain can actually be broken down into several components that add up to the total weight, and these are:

1. Baby – 8 pounds
2. Placenta – 2 pounds
3. Amniotic fluid – 2 pounds
4. Uterus – 2 pounds
5. Maternal breast tissue – 2 pounds
6. Maternal blood – 4 pounds
7. Fluid in maternal tissue – 4 pounds
8. Maternal fat and nutrient stores – 7 pounds

As you may have noticed, all of that adds up to about 31 pounds. Bear in mind though that this is no exact figure, but for someone who was at a healthy weight before pregnancy, the average ideal weight gain during pregnancy is about 25 to 37 pounds.

On the other hand, if you were underweight before pregnancy, you would probably gain 28 to 40 pounds, whereas if you were overweight, it would be normal to gain 15 to 25 pounds.

If you're asking yourself why all this difference in weight gain exists, then simply think of it this way: Apart from all of the baby-related weight gain items we discussed, the final one was the maternal fat and nutrient stores.

These stores are essentially stored up energy that you and your baby will need – and they're just like any other energy stores.

Soon you'll see how this links in with losing weight, but for now, just keep it in mind.

Suffice to say, if you were overweight initially, you'll need less energy stores, whereas if you were underweight, you'll need more.

Another point that you should take away from what you've just learnt is the fact that, you really aren't gaining that much weight at all in the long run. Most of what you do gain can, and will, be lost when you go through delivery.

What remains are mostly those energy stores that we talked about.

Of course, this is the 'ideal' situation. Truth is, many of us actually end up gaining more weight during pregnancy than we 'ideally' should. Still, even in that situation it is completely possible to trim off the extra weight after pregnancy!

Now that we've given you an overview on weight gain during pregnancy itself, let's quickly move on and tie things together with weight loss, and to do so, we need to discuss a concept that you may, or may not, already know quite a bit about...

Everything You Need To Know About Calories

Heard the term calories before? Assuming you've read anything about diets, losing weight, or something like that, you probably have at least encountered mention of it before.

Frankly speaking though, a calorie is just a measure of energy.

If that surprises you, then look at it this way: We eat food not just because it tastes good, but also because our body needs it. And while there are many components of food, such as nutrients, that are part and parcel of the reason that our body needs food, the main underlying reason that we eat is to acquire energy.

Essentially our body takes food, most notably such things as protein, carbohydrate, and fats, and turns them into energy.

So a calorie is just a certain amount of energy that can be obtained from some type of food.

Look at these examples to see how that works:

1. Fats provide 9 calories per gram
2. Proteins provide 4 calories per gram
3. Carbohydrates provide 4 calories per gram
4. Alcohols provide 7 calories per gram

See what we mean now? So basically, depending on the type of food that you're eating, the amount of energy that you'll be acquiring from that food could differ greatly. Some, very fatty, foods could even provide more than double the amount of energy as a food high in protein.

All this is great to know, but you may be wondering how it ties in to weight gain... and loss.

Linking Calories to Weight Gain during Pregnancy

So calories are energy, great – but why do you need to know that? What we're interested in is weight gain and weight loss; not energy.

Well, the core piece of information that you absolutely need to have to link these two things together is really something quite simple: Weight gain, in the form of fat, is caused by excess energy being 'stored' by the body.

When you eat, you're gaining energy. And when you have energy, your body uses it for a variety of functions. If however all of the energy you've gained isn't used up, then your body doesn't just throw it away – it stores it!

These 'stores of energy' take the form of fat, which is the body's way of ensuring that if you run out of energy, you have some reserves to fall back on.

That's the maternal fat and nutrient stores that we were talking about earlier. Stored energy, waiting to be used for your and your baby's needs

As a result of this, you can now reasonably be sure that on top of the weight gain caused by changes to your body itself, and your baby, the rest of the weight that you gain is going to be caused by excess energy being stored in the form of fat.

Although this realization may seem like a relatively simple one, don't underestimate its significance, because it leads us to another important concept...

Linking Calories to Weight Loss

Now we actually begin to get into the part that you're most interested in – weight loss.

Based on what you know so far, you already have stumbled upon one of the easiest ways to help along your efforts to get back shape after pregnancy, and that is: Limit your weight gain during pregnancy.

If you can keep your weight gain during pregnancy within the ideal limits, then you'll undoubtedly find that your weight loss after pregnancy is going to be much, much easier!

Apart from that though, the other key realization of this section is that once your body has consumed all available energy (that it obtains from food), it burns through the energy stores (fat), converting them into energy, and consuming them.

For this reason, diets are effective. In a nutshell, the way that diets work is that they scale back your calorie consumption so that you're acquiring less energy from food sources, and thus forcing your body to consume its reserves instead.

Similarly, exercise or anything that causes your body to use more energy, also burns through your existing energy and also forces your body to burn through its reserves.

See now how calories form a crucial foundation for any discussion of weight loss?

Knowing this, you may actually feel ready to get out there and start trimming down, and the truth is – you probably could. Understanding calories and how they work is one of the surest ways to be able to devise a plan to lose weight.

But there are other hurdles that await you when trying to lose weight after pregnancy, so it would be in your best interests to keep reading. Frankly, we're not even halfway done yet!

Firmly Resolving to Lose Weight after Pregnancy

Before you can actually start losing weight, you need to ensure that your feet are set firmly upon the path ahead of you.

Be mindful that with your changed lifestyle, it is going to take you a while to adapt and get used to all the extra demands that are now placed upon you, and this can be quite an effort to deal with on its own.

Still, that doesn't mean that you should put off getting back into shape – quite the opposite!

Truth is, the longer you put off starting to trim down and get back your former figure, it is going to get harder for you to do so. Even if you aren't putting on any extra weight, once you've somewhat 'settled' into a regular routine and gotten used to your new lifestyle, it is going to be difficult for you to change it.

Due to this, the absolute best time for you to start to try to trim down is: Right now!

In other words, you should start doing so as soon as possible, so that your weight loss efforts become part and parcel of your new lifestyle. That way, you won't need to try to fit them in after you've already settled, but will learn to cope with them along with all the other demands placed on you.

After all, what is one more demand, right?

Regardless of when you actually begin though, once you do, you need to be willing to see it through to the finish. Granted, there will be times when you find that you're forced to deviate from your schedule, and you shouldn't beat yourself up too much over this – it does happen.

But as you'll soon see, there are ways in which you can minimize the risk of you having to miss a workout session.

So long as you're willing to stay the course, you'll find that you'll be able to attain your goals quickly, and with few problems, if any.

Of course, this doesn't mean that it is going to be a walk in the park. There will be trying times, and there will be times when you question whether or not it is worth it – but if your resolve is tough enough to know that you want to lose weight, you'll get through this.

As we go through the next few sections, we're going to start giving you the best ways to start off exercising, possibly even right after you deliver your baby!

Kicking off your efforts in this fashion, you'll find that you're able to get that much further, faster than you ever imagined possible.

Are you ready to begin now?

Before You Begin Any Weight Loss Effort...

Motivating yourself to succeed is all well and good, but you don't want to push yourself too far, and most importantly, you don't want to do anything that may be a risk to your health.

Considering the changes that your body and life are both going through, this is all the more important. For this reason, more than any other, you need to ensure that you're going about all efforts properly and keeping them as risk-free as possible.

With this in mind, there are a few things in particular you should know, and first and foremost, let's look at...

Warming Up and Stretching!

Soon enough, you'll be starting your workouts, and when you do the one thing that you should definitely always be doing is warming up and stretching properly.

Look at your warm up as 'getting your body into gear'. Considering that you probably haven't exercised in at least nine months (or maybe longer!), this is extremely crucial because your body is undoubtedly not too accustomed to being put through strenuous workouts, or any workouts at all!

Due to that, your warm up and stretching can at least help prepare your body somewhat for what you're going to be doing.

Generally speaking, there are several options that you could choose from during your warm up. Most of them revolve around whether or not you want some form of mild aerobic exercise during it (we'll get to what exactly this is later).

That aside though, the one undeniably crucial part of any warm up is stretching, and there's no two ways about this – you must stretch!

Frankly, most people know that they have to stretch, but they don't do so because they either feel that it isn't needed, or that their body will just automatically stretch itself if they start their workout slowly and ease into things.

To a degree this is true, but when you try to just get your body to 'automatically' stretch out, you're not going to be stretching properly at all. Instead, some muscles will be semi-stretched, and others, not at all.

End of the day, getting stretched out is something that only takes five minutes or so, and by limbering up your muscles, you can avoid cramps, and worse, muscle tears!

In order to ensure that you've stretched as properly as possible, it would be best for you to devise a fixed routine, and then stick to it. Gradually, you'll get used to this routine, and perform it almost automatically.

One way that works best for most people is to start at the top and work your way down.

What this means is that you should start off with your neck muscles, then work down to your shoulders, upper arms (biceps and triceps!), chest, upper back, abdomen, elbows, lower arms, wrists, waist, groin, hamstring, upper legs, knees, lower legs, and finally, ankles.

Sounds like a lot of muscles to stretch? Well, even if you aren't going to be using all of those muscles fully in your chosen workout, the fact of the matter is that they're probably going to contribute in some way, however small.

Therefore, your stretching should be as complete as possible.

Having dealt with the warm up, let's just go over something else that you should know before you start exercising, and that is...

Signs and Symptoms to Watch Out For

Whether or not you like to acknowledge it, you are in a less than ideal physical condition. Even if you were in great shape prior to pregnancy, all the changes your body has gone through over the last nine months would definitely have had some impact.

And even after delivery, those changes are going to continue to have an affect for a few weeks, or even months.

Bearing this in mind, you need to limit your risks. Pushing yourself as hard as you can is definitely off the table, and you can't train as if you're trying to make the next Olympics or something.

Even though this is true, and even if you're not pushing yourself, you should still pay attention to signs from your body that you're going too far.

Some of these signs are the kind of thing you would expect to happen when you work out, such as a shortness of breath. Nothing wrong with this, but it is a sign from your body that it has to strain itself, and you should avoid going even this far within the first few weeks after you've delivered.

More importantly however, you especially want to keep an eye open for cramps, muscle tenseness, and other 'painful' muscle symptoms.

These are more telling signs that you're certainly going a little too far, and if you find yourself facing any of these, you should stop whatever you're doing and relax for a while. Then, try a few stretches in the affected area, and see if the pain has subsided.

If it has, feel free to continue, but if you persistently have the same problem, you'd best contact a doctor.

All said and done, you should basically just pay attention to your body, and how it reacts to your exercise. Do that, and you should be fine.

At this point, we've covered pretty much everything you need to know before you start exercising... so all that is left now is to actually start!

Starting to Trim Down Right after Pregnancy

By now, you should be resolved as to the path before you, so all that really remains is to get started.

From what we've already discussed regarding calories, you know that there are two main ways of losing weight: Dieting to cut down on the amount of calories you consume, and exercising to burn more calories than you regularly would.

Needless to say, it seems logical that the best way to proceed would be to do both!

In many ways, that is certainly true, and we'll be discussing this later. But considering you've just delivered, and you're dealing with so many new things at once, now may not be the best time to put your body through rigorous changes.

So instead of dieting and going through strenuous exercise routines, the best way to start trimming down right after your pregnancy is to approach things gradually!

Let's take a look at how you can accomplish exactly this...

Beginning With Slow and Easy Exercises

Were you to consult a doctor regarding when you can begin trimming down, you'd most likely be advised to wait until after your first postnatal checkup, which is normally about 6 weeks after delivery.

Although this is sound advice, because you'll want to ensure that everything is fine before you start off on any heavy exercise, you could still slowly begin a few simple workouts.

Of course, despite this, you should also know and realize that you're going to be tired out quite a bit from taking care of your newborn, so don't push too hard with any exercise that you do perform.

To start off though, you should first know that there are two types of exercises that you can choose from, and they are:

1. Aerobic (Cardiovascular) Exercise

For the most part, aerobic exercises are hailed as being the main contributing exercise that helps weight loss. And yes, they are also known as cardiovascular exercise, so if you hear that term being used, it means practically the same thing.

In a nutshell, aerobic exercise is any type of exercise that gets the heart pumping fast.

When this happens, you're going to be consuming more energy, and therefore burning fat faster, which is why it is so often recommended for anyone who wants to lose weight.

On top of that however, you're also going to be strengthening your heart and circulation system, because you're effectively causing more blood to course throughout your entire body.

Couple this with the fact that cardiovascular exercise is going to help with your stamina and general fitness levels, and you already have several compelling reasons to get started with this kind of workout.

So yes, any type of exercise that gets your heart rate going is good, but most commonly things such as brisk walks, running, jogging, cycling, swimming, and so on are the bread-and-butter type aerobic exercises that many opt for.

Needless to say, aerobic routines are also a form of aerobics exercise.

While most people are willing to just carry out aerobic exercises and leave it at that, there is another type of exercise out there that is worth considering...

2. Strength Building Exercises

In contrast to aerobic exercises, strength building exercises aren't focused on causing your heart to beat faster.

Instead, these types of exercises require you to work your muscles and thus, strengthen them. To put it simply, strength building exercises generally revolve around resistance training, which consists of exercises that involve training against a resistance.

Yes, most often this means weights, though there are other forms of resistance training too.

Now you may be wondering why you have to know about this at all. After all, you're interested in losing weight, not becoming a bodybuilder – so why is this type of exercise at all relevant?

And the answer to that is simple: Strength building exercises aren't just there for you to 'bulk up'. Instead, strength building exercises can actually help you to tone your muscles so that they're firm and taut.

When this happens, you can achieve a lean and trim figure with greater ease.

Furthermore, strengthening and toning your muscles is also going to help increase your metabolism rate, because your body is going to require more energy in general.

In turn, this will help any and all efforts that you undergo to lose weight.

Knowing that both of these types of exercise have their part to play is really just the beginning, but for now, you know enough for us to leave it at that. Seeing as we've already mentioned that you're not going to want to push yourself too far, there isn't much need to go deeper than we already have just yet.

What you should realize is that both of these exercises are necessary, and you should start out, slowly, with both!

For now, until your first postnatal check up, you can ease yourself into things by doing the following:

1. Start off with brisk walking. If you were very athletic previously, or in great shape, you could even consider short jogs.
2. Try pelvic floor exercises, and things like abdomen crunches, to start off with.

Both of these exercise types should help you to get started on a workout that isn't too demanding. That said, you may notice that you have a small problem, and that is simply the fact that you don't have time to carry out either of these!

Admittedly, something like pelvic floor exercises, and crunches, are easier to fit in, considering you can do them from the comfort of your own home. However walking and jogging might be harder to accommodate, which brings us to our next point of discussion.

Finding Ways to Fit in a Workout Routine

Already, we discussed how you should start out your exercise routine. Now, we need to figure out how you can fit it in, amidst all the other demands on your time!

Keep one thing in mind throughout all of this: Unless you have someone to take care of your baby, you're not going to be able to leave him or her alone and go out to exercise. That much is a given.

What this means is that you are faced with several options:

1. Finding someone to take care of your baby while you work out
2. Working out at home where you can keep an eye on your child at the same time
3. Taking your baby with you while you go work out

As far as these options go, none are really 'ideal'. While finding someone to take care of your baby while you work out seems like a nice option, the truth is that you probably won't want to leave your baby, at least not during the first few weeks or months.

Similarly, working out at home where you can keep an eye on your baby is going to severely limit your options, and you can be sure that your workouts are going to be interrupted affairs.

As for taking your baby along with you... well, in some cases that is possible, and it is even a good option, but just as with working out at home, there will be interruptions, and it could be very inconvenient.

But here's the bottom line: Naturally, your child is your first priority. No matter what you do, and how well you plan it, your workouts come as a distinct second place (or possibly last place) when compared to your child.

So what you need to do is develop a certain amount of flexibility.

Knowing that your workouts can, and will, be interrupted affairs, you shouldn't let that get to you. Instead, snatch whatever time you can, here and there, to work out in short spurts.

When you first start out, you could use a sling to carry your child and go for a walk around your neighborhood. Some women even find that carrying out aerobic routines (with the help of many available videos, and so on) in the comfort of their own homes is an ideal solution.

Depending on what you prefer, you should find some way to fit in your workouts around your circumstances.

If you can, you should try to apply a fixed schedule to your workouts. Naturally, you're not going to be able to be too 'fixed' about it, but at least having a rough idea of when you would want to work out, all other things permitting, will help.

Establishing a routine is advantageous because once you've mentally assigned a certain time on a certain day for working out, you'll slowly feel driven to work out during that time.

Initially, true, your workouts may seem to be nine parts chore, but eventually your body's reaction to working out will give you a 'good feeling' that will subconsciously make you want to work out more.

Really, the toughest part is getting through the first stage of working out, i.e. when your body is unused and unprepared for it. After that, it should be smooth sailing.

Anyway, now that we've talked about how you can fit your workouts into your postnatal routine (i.e. by being flexible about it), let's move on and look at how you can gradually move from a slow and easy workout to more strenuous activities.

And at the same time, you'll also be able to incorporate other weight loss techniques, which will get you into the shape that you want to be in faster and more effectively.

So, shall we proceed?

Gradually Upping the Ante of Your Weight Loss

Earlier, we'd dealt with how, for the first 6 weeks or so at least, until your first postnatal check up, you should go easy on your workouts.

Mind you, this doesn't mean that you should continue at the same level all the time. Even within the first 6 weeks itself, you'll want to be gradually upping the intensity of your workouts, but taking care to ensure that you never go too far.

For this period, the rule of thumb is to take everything slow – and that means that you should gradually up the ante, but in small and steady increments.

However, once you've gone for your first postnatal check up, and your doctor has cleared you and given you a clean bill of health, you should be able to really take strides forward, and go all out to get back to your former figure, or better!

It is at this point in time that the real challenge begins, and you'll now be free to steadily move on to more intense workouts that will help you burn more of that excess weight, in less time.

Also, seeing as you've spent about 6 weeks or so slowly building up your general fitness level, you're perfectly poised to start higher intensity workouts!

But keep in mind that although you're relatively freer, in terms of the diversity of workouts that you can now perform, you're still going to have to balance whatever workout you choose against the demands placed on your time by your child.

Get used to this balancing routine – because it's something that you'll be doing for a long time still, though the rewards are certainly more than worth it!

Anyway, let's look at some specific ways you can up the ante for both aerobic and strength building workouts!

Moving Forward with Aerobic Workouts

In many ways, upping the ante for aerobic workouts is really the easiest thing in the world: Just push yourself harder.

Assuming that up to this point you've been going for brisk walks, you might want to try jogging, or even running. Alternatively, there are countless other aerobic exercises that you could be trying out too.

Some of these, for example, swimming and rowing, actually double as strength building workouts too.

End of the day, the only rules that you need to follow when picking how to move forward with aerobic workouts are:

1. Pick something that you think you'll enjoy doing, and
2. Pick something that you can fit into your schedule somehow

Being a mother, in your case the priority is heavily on the second, so while swimming and rowing may seem like nice options, they will require you to really find time aside, and also arrange for someone to watch your child.

Once again, it is equally possible to carry out an aerobics workout routine from home, just upping the intensity of the workout.

Choose wisely!

Moving Forward with Strength Building Exercises

Unlike aerobics, moving forward with strength building exercises is going to require that you transition from simple pelvic floor exercises and crunches on to something more: Weights.

Unfortunately, the easiest way to get started with this is to go to a gym and use the machines there. Needless to say, this may not be an option, considering you have a child to take care of at home.

So instead, you could buy some free weights and start using them to work out.

Seeing as the idea of your strength building exercises are to establish muscle tone, rather than build bulk or power, the focus of your exercises should be to perform high repetitions at low weights.

That means that you're not going to need to be hefting around heavy weights, but rather you should pick a weight that you're comfortable with, and can move easily, and then perform many repetitions of a given motion.

This is the key to gaining muscle tone, and it is what you should be shooting for.

Getting to know the different types of free weight movements that can target different muscles is something else altogether though, but thankfully you should have no problems locating more than enough resources on the matter – either through the internet, or through readily available exercise videos and DVDs.

By using free weights, you'll be able to work out from home, and thus have your baby with you at all times, and retain the flexibility that you now know is so essential.

Coupling Exercise with Calorie Cutting

Last, but certainly not least, we're going to discuss cutting down on your calorie intake. If you remember, we'd mentioned that the surest and best way to lose weight was to cut down on calorie intake, while increasing the amount of calories burnt through exercise.

Previously, we weren't too concerned about calorie cutting, simply because you would need to have as much energy as possible.

Now though, you can afford to scale back on the amount of calories you're consuming, and yes, that does mean going on a 'diet' of sorts.

Unfortunately, the common misunderstanding is that to go on a diet, you need to completely starve yourself and stop eating anything that is remotely tasty. Make no mistake, this isn't the case, and in fact, starving yourself of calories and nutrients is going to be terrible for your health.

Instead, you should strive for a balanced diet that gives you sufficient calories as well as all the necessary nutrients you need to live a healthy life.

Most of us don't really have balanced diets at all, and the average American diet is generally too calorie-heavy anyway. Thus, you'll find that simply by converting to a balanced diet, you'll be cutting on calories, and embracing an overall healthier lifestyle.

If you don't know what a balanced diet is, well, you should easily be able to find information on it, or even ask your doctor when you go for your postnatal check up!

With that though, we've come to the tail end of this guide, and you are now privy to pretty much everything you need to know about getting back into shape after your pregnancy!

Getting in Shape and Staying in Shape

After hanging in with us from start to finish, you really know a lot about getting into shape. In fact, you know more than enough to actually end up in better shape than you started.

If you follow the steps we've outlined, you should have no problems acquiring whatever type of figure you've always dreamed of. By burning through the excess weight you might be carrying, and toning your muscles, you'll quickly begin to see amazing results.

Throughout it all though remember that right now, as a parent; the most important thing for you to do is take care of your child.

Everything else comes second, including your efforts to get back into shape.

Still, with a little bit of effort, and all the know how that you now have, you should be able to do both easily!

Good luck!