Breastfeeding positions & Post-natal exercises for new mothers
As a new mother, you would be exhilarated, joyous, a little scared, definitely sleep-deprived and sore & aching all over….

While all this is happening to you, you have to rapidly develop new skills – breastfeeding, for example.

With so much on your plate and your little bundle of happiness demanding every ounce of your attention, it is tough to think about things like exercise.

Getting back into shape is every new mother’s dream; only, there’s never enough time to work towards it.

This booklet tries to make things a little easier for you. Through illustrations and a simple set of instructions, we take you through breastfeeding positions that reduce stress, even as they help you bond with your baby, and a basic exercise regimen that gets you back in shape for an active lifestyle…

Congratulations on the new arrival!
For all the new mothers who think that breastfeeding is one of the most natural things in the world and that they should instinctively know how to effectively nurse a child at the breast, here’s a bit of news: breastfeeding is a skill that needs to be learnt.

It can be confusing the first time a new mother attempts it. There are two words that a new mother must learn, in order to develop this skill – patience and positioning.

Positioning your baby properly is 90% of the job done. This is important not only for the baby to feed properly but also helps the mother to relieve stresses and aches that build up with an incorrect posture.

Being comfortable and being able to get your baby to the breast easily is the mantra of a good position. Always sit with proper back support with pillow behind back on sofa, bed or chair. Finding a position you are happy with will make it easier for you to latch your baby on to your breast. Whatever position you choose, make sure that your baby's head is able to tip back slightly as she feeds.

Over time, there will be a position that you find more comfortable than the others. As your baby grows, even this will change.

Some common positions are as illustrated along side.
Exercise FAQs...

How soon after giving birth can I start exercising?
Generally you can begin exercising your pelvic floor and lower tummy muscles as soon as you feel ready. In case of a normal vaginal delivery, start with exercises a week after delivery. If you have had a C-section, start simple exercises a week after delivery. Abdominal exercises can be started after 8 weeks.

Unless you are advised otherwise, it is a good idea to avoid swimming for the first six weeks to minimise the risk of infection.

When should I delay exercising?
If you are experiencing
1) Back Pain
2) Pelvic Pain
3) Leaking Urine,
consult your gynaecologist, before starting exercising.

Can I exercise if I am breastfeeding?
Avoid exercises that make your breasts sore or tender, and always try to exercise after feeding your baby. Your breasts won’t feel uncomfortably full, and your baby will appreciate it, too.

What’s the best way to lose weight?
Many new mothers are understandably eager to work off the extra weight of pregnancy as soon as their baby is born. The immediate post-natal period is not a good time to start dieting, however, especially if you are establishing breastfeeding. Trying to speed up weight loss whilst breastfeeding may mean that your milk will contain chemicals called ketones which are potentially unhealthy for your baby.

Eating sensibly and exercising regularly (remember that brisk walking is an excellent form of exercise) will help in getting back into shape.

Many women will lose weight simply through breastfeeding, but this is not true for everyone. Remember that it took nine months to put on the weight, so don’t expect to lose it too quickly. As a rule, try to regard the first year as the time it may take you to get back to normal weight safely.

Work out for at least 30 minutes. Include exercises targeted at toning the muscles most affected by pregnancy - at least three to five days a week. If you weren’t active during your pregnancy, start with a 15-minute programme and gradually increase to 30 minutes.

What are the advantages of post-natal exercises?
There are several reasons why it’s a good idea to start some gentle exercise soon after you’ve had a baby. Exercise has many benefits. It can:
1) Help boost your mood by increasing the levels of feel-good chemicals in your brain (such as endorphins).
2) Help you to regain your pre-baby figure and lose weight.
3) Protect you from aches and pains and give you more energy if you are feeling tired.
4) Improve physical strength and stamina which will make looking after a newborn baby easier.

How do I get started?
The most important exercises in the first few days after birth are pelvic floor exercises, so start doing them as soon as you can.

Exercises can be increased in the following progression:
1) Kegel’s / Pelvic floor exercises
2) Neck & Shoulder exercises
3) Abdominals & Back exercises

1) Pelvic Floor exercises:

![Diagram of the Pelvic Floor]

The Pelvic Floor is a sling of muscle and fibrous tissue which supports the contents of the pelvis and helps control continence. During pregnancy the pregnancy hormones and the weight of the baby may have a weakening effect on the pelvic floor. Vaginal delivery stretches and weakens the pelvic floor. Recovery of this muscle is important for continence and to support the pelvic organs. It is recommended that all women exercise their pelvic floor muscles regularly throughout life.

Exercises are as follows:
There are two ways of exercising the pelvic floor. Begin by lying on your back with your knees bent and legs slightly apart.

1) Squeeze and draw up the muscles around your anus, vagina and urethra as strongly as possible. Try to hold this squeeze and lift for 2-3 seconds then relax completely. Repeat this exercise 3-5 more times, at least 6 times a day.

2) Gradually increase your pelvic floor muscle strength by holding the squeeze and lift for a longer period. To progress your exercises hold each contraction strongly for as long as you can, slowly increasing to 10 seconds.

Rest between each contraction and repeat as many times as you can, aiming for a maximum of 10 contractions. Always stop exercising when the muscle fatigues.
Post-natal exercises...

These exercises can be done when sitting or standing as well as lying down.

3) It is also important to include fast, strong pelvic floor contractions holding each exercise for only one second. This action is necessary for retraining the muscle to contract quickly when you cough, laugh or sneeze.

4) Now try doing 5-10 quick strong exercises. Do not forget to rest between each exercise. Try to do at least 4 sets of exercises each day at home.

To further help the healing process:

1) Rest in a horizontal position (15-30 minutes at least twice a day) or as much as possible on tummy or back.
2) Support the perineum when opening your bowels
3) Do not lift anything heavier than your baby.

Twelve weeks after your baby’s birth:

Check your pelvic floor strength by:
1) Stopping the flow of urine mid stream
2) Coughing with a full bladder
3) Prior to commencing strenuous exercise, check your pelvic floor strength by jumping with a full bladder

If there is no urine leakage you can reduce your pelvic floor exercises to one maximum set a day. This set should include the long holds and the quick squeezes. If you have leakage, see a Physiotherapist.
2) Neck and shoulder exercises:
It is easy to spend a lot of time sitting in a slumped position while you are caring for your baby, while breastfeeding for example. Poor posture can give you the appearance of rounded shoulders, saggy breasts and a saggy tummy, as well as neck or upper back pain. Sit upright in a supportive chair to help improve your posture. You can also try these exercises to stretch and move your upper back and neck.

- Push the head forward against the palm, keeping palm stationary
- Push the head towards one side against the palm keeping palm stationary. Repeat on the other side
- Push the head against a bed
- Press face against steady palm and repeat on other side
- Clasp and Stretch away
- Sit with arms relaxed by the sides. Shrug the shoulders
- Brace shoulders
- Rotate the shoulders. First take them in front, up behind, down and bring them in front, now reverse the order and rotate

Neck & shoulder exercises
3) Abdominals & Back exercises:

1) Tighten the abdomen and relax
2) Lie on bed and push elbow against bed
3) Pull feet towards you and then push away
4) Raise head, neck and shoulders while breathing out
5) Raise the head
6) Clasp the knees, and pull towards yourself
7) Clasp the knees, and pull towards yourself
8) Raise and lower legs one after another by 30 cms
Post-natal exercises...

9) Take both knees to one side and then to the other side
10) Turn to one side and then to other side
11) Raise head, neck and chest looking up
12) Raise leg one after another by 30 cm
13) Do cycling motions while lying down

Abdominals & back exercises...
Things to Remember...

Keep in mind that your ligaments and joints will be loose for at least three months following the birth, so avoid any high impact exercises or sports that require rapid direction changes. Vigorous stretching should be avoided too. Recommended post-natal exercise includes:

- Brisk walking
- Swimming
- Aqua-aerobics
- Yoga
- Pilates
- Low impact aerobic workouts
- Light weight training
- Cycling

See your doctor for further recommendations and precautions.

General suggestions
Do consult your doctor, but general suggestions are as follows:

Give yourself sufficient time to heal, particularly if you have had a Caesarean delivery.

Initially, exercise for about 15 minutes at a time. Increase the length of your workouts gradually.

Remember that it may take you months to return to your pre-pregnancy shape and weight, so don’t be discouraged by slow progress.

Warning signs to slow down
Don’t overexert yourself. Your body gives out warning signs if you are exercising too hard, and these signs may include:

- Increased fatigue
- Muscle aches and pains
- Colour changes to lochia (post-partum vaginal flow, to pink or red)
- Heavier lochia flow
- Lochia starts flowing again after it has stopped

Most of all, understand that motherhood is a great experience & that a little care will make it a truly enjoyable one!