

5 Reasons Why You Should Rehabilitate With Pilates After Childbirth

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There are 3-4 babies born every second. This averages to be about 250 babies born every minute and over 15,000 babies born every hour with a big 4 million babies born every year, according to Ask.com.

That's a lot of babies. Pregnancy and childbirth is such a common occurrence for women that we forget about the miracle of the event. It is in fact an incredible miracle. According to Baby.com, "About 10 percent of reproductive-age couples in the United States will have difficulty getting pregnant. About 30 percent of cases are due to fertility problems in the woman, 30 percent to fertility problems in the man, and the rest to unexplained causes or multiple factors involving both partners."

We don't often talk about what to do during pregnancy and childbirth to help women mentally and physically. We know that pregnancy involves rapid weight gain, pelvic expansion, stretched ligaments, abdominal wall stretching, hormonal increase, along with the array of possible complications like onset diabetes, preeclampsia, edema or swelling, and just overall irritability due to a hormone shift. Add to that, overwhelm of caring for a sleepless newborn, hair loss, and maintaining nutrients for nursing. These are more than enough reasons why every new mom should take extra care of her self during and after pregnancy.

I credit my Pilates practice for getting me back to pre-pregnancy strength.



Felicity Murphy Photography, Natalie Garay

My three daughters were delivered via cesarean section, which is a major abdominal surgery. I was ordered to bed rest in the 7th month of pregnancy with my twin daughters. After almost 8 weeks of bed rest, with only trips to the restroom and back for physical activity, my muscles atrophied greatly. Carrying twins, coupled with inactivity and a cesarean section meant that I would definitely need rehabilitation.

Here's a list of 5 reasons why you should rehabilitate after childbirth.

1.) Hormones: Hormones increase during pregnancy causing irritability, fear and anxiety. After childbirth, hormone levels shift again, which can result in emotional sensitivity, anxiety, and depression. A hormone called, Relaxin increases during pregnancy relaxing the pelvis and ligaments to get the body ready for delivery.

ery. Extra caution should be used when exercising and stretching because overexertion could cause pulled or strained muscles or ligaments. Once baby is delivered, and your doctor approves, continuing with light physical exercise is a great way to help calm anxiety, increase endorphins, which will offset depression, and help with overall mood enhancement. Pilates provides a safe, relaxing way to ease back into exercising after delivery.

2.) Abdominal wall: There are several muscles that make up the abdominal wall. The top layer of our abdominal wall is the rectus abdominus, also known as the “six pack abs”, below that we have the internal and external obliques which fit us like a corset, then below that is the lowest and deepest muscle called the transversus abdominus, which fits us like a lumbar support belt Costco workers tend to wear. When the abdominal wall is stretched during pregnancy it causes weakness in the abdominals, which then causes our low back to pay the price. Low back pain is one of the most common complaints people come to me with. Now, if mom has a cesarean section, once cleared by the doctor, Pilates is excellent for strengthening those stretched out abdominal muscles as well as rehabilitating after cesarean section surgeries. Cesarean sections involve cutting through the abdominal wall layers, which is a major abdominal surgery, and should definitely be rehabbed as such.

3.) Pelvis: A pregnant woman’s pelvis expands during pregnancy with the help of the hormone Relaxin as mentioned above, in order to prepare for delivery. This can sometimes cause alignment issues in the pelvis and back causing low backaches or sciatic nerve compression. Once baby is delivered it’s very important to work on strengthening the muscles that support the pelvis and help realign the pelvis as it shifts back into pre-pregnancy position. Pilates exercises are meant to be executed in a slow, concentrated fashion to effectively target the appropriate muscle groups that will help regain proper body alignment.

4.) Mind: Having a new baby to care for is enough work in itself, add to that, other children and running a household or a business and we’ve got major mama overload. It’s extremely important for new moms to take care of themselves after delivery. Take some quiet time alone, nap, and exercise. Pilates breathing techniques will help with relaxation. Most of us take short, shallow breaths throughout the day, when actually if we increased our breathing to deeper, fuller inhales and exhales we’d notice a lot more mind-clarity and feel much more relaxed.

5.) Back: Oh, the poor back, it takes the brunt of our everyday activities. If only we used our core strength more than our back it would get a little relief. The lumbar spine seems to be the most offended. More than half of my clients with back issues complain of low back pain, the lumbar spine. Our deepest abdominal muscle supports the lumbar spine, which is the transversus abdominus. By strengthening the “core” muscles, or the muscles that surround and support the spine, we alleviate the back while also improving posture. Pilates exercises rely on using the core muscles, you must first engage your abdominal muscles for the strength to execute each exercise effectively.

If you’re experiencing weakness or aches after childbirth, send your questions my way. I’m happy to recommend exercises and stretches to help you alleviate them.