

Postnatal flat tummy plan: Exercises to tone and flatten your stomach after childbirth

Chances are that your new flabby tummy is one of the things you are most shocked about in terms of changes to your body after having a baby. Fear not! It is perfectly normal to still look pregnant for a while after you have had your baby, and be able to grab a handful of squidgy belly! The first thing you need to think about post-birth, before you start exercising your abs, is how your tummy has responded to pregnancy and birth.

Diastasis - very important you check this before you do the exercises in this plan!

You may have some separation of the abdominal muscles during and after pregnancy (the technical term is 'diastasis', which sounds scarier than it is). Around a third of women experience this. This is obvious when you think of how much your tummy needs to expand to accommodate your little babe. When you have had your baby, you will be able to feel whether you have this separation, or not, with your fingers.

To check.....Lie on your back, with your feet on the floor, knees bent and head and shoulders lifted. Feel above and below your belly button to see if you can find a gully between your tummy muscles. You should avoid sit-up type exercises (like the ones in this plan) until this gap has closed to less than two fingers width, until then you can focus on strengthening your core. Start gently and build up.

For all the exercises below remember is to always draw your belly button in so that your back doesn't arch and is flat on the floor at all times. For maximum flatness breath out as you curl up (or on the effort of the exercise) and inhale as you release down and make sure there is a fist sized gap beneath your chin. Try to minimise the rest between exercises for maximum benefit.

If you like this please check out my web site: www.bump2mumfitness.com and my book *The 3-Plan: Your Complete Pregnancy and Postnatal Exercise Plan* (on Amazon), which has over 75 exercises for pregnancy and the postnatal period.

**Postnatal flat tummy plan
(10-15 minutes, 10 exercises to work your core, oblique and surface abs.
Try to do every day for best results!)**

1. Pulse up 3 then down

Lay back with your knees bent at 90 degrees about hip width apart and feet on the floor. Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Have your hands by your temples. Lift your head and shoulder blades off of the floor, with a gap between your chin and chest. Squeeze up and pulse for 3 at your highest point then release back to the floor.

Repeat x 20 counts of 3 (all centre)

2. Pulse across 3 then down

Lay back with your knees bent at 90 degrees about hip width apart and feet on the floor. Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Have your hands by your temples. Lift your head and shoulders and reach your hand across to the outside of the opposite knee. Squeeze over and pulse for 3 at the outermost point then release back to the floor.

Repeat x 20 counts of 3 (alternate sides)

3. Heels down, one at a time then together

Lay back with your knees about hip width apart and legs lifted up at 90 degrees (so your knees are over your chest). Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Have your hands by your temples. Lift your head and shoulders off of the floor, with a gap between your chin and chest. Slowly lower one leg (keep it bent at 90 degrees) so that your heel just touches the ground and then return to the starting position. Really pull your lower abs in as you lower your heels to the floor and pull the legs back up.

Repeat alternate legs x 30

Plus.....If you can touch both heels down together this is much harder!

4. Elbows to knees / cycle

Lay back with your knees about hip width apart and legs lifted up at 90 degrees (so your knees are over your chest). Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Have your hands by your temples, with a gap between your chin and chest. Gradually straighten one leg and twist across your body so that you elbow touches the knee on the bent leg. As you slowly bring the leg back in, start to straighten the other leg and twist to the other side (a bit like cycling, but with straight legs). Try to straighten your legs close to the floor.

Repeat alternate legs x 50

5. Leg raises

Lay back with your hands part way under your bum and head and shoulders on the floor. Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Keeping your lower back on the floor extend legs fully straight and maintain the extension. Move your legs up and down in a scissor action, but do not let your feet touch the floor. The move should be slow and controlled, do not swing legs. Your lower back must stay on the floor throughout.

Repeat alternate legs x 50

6. Reverse curls

Lay back with your knees bent at 90 degrees about hip width apart and feet on the floor. Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Have your hands by your sides or part way under your bum. Pull the knees to the chest and push your feet up towards the ceiling, raising the hips off the floor. Do not swing your legs and use your lower abs to lift in a controlled way. Slowly return to starting position.

Repeat x 20

7. Balance pump and arms

Lay back on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Slowly lift your legs (they should be together and straight at around 45 degrees) and lift your head and neck off the floor, with a gap between your chin and chest. Draw your abdominals in to stabilise you and lower your legs as far as you can (this will get progressively further). You can stay in this position and hold or hold your arms out straight in front of you and pump them up and down in tiny quick pulsing movements.

Aim to hold for 30-60 seconds (with or without pulsing arms) and repeat twice

8. Reach to sides

Lay back with your knees bent at 90 degrees about hip width apart and feet on the floor. Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Have your hands by your temples. Lift your head and shoulders and reach your hand to the outside of your calf, squeezing your waist at the side as you do. Slowly return to starting position.

Repeat x 20 (alternate sides)

9. Touch your toes

Lay back with your legs straight (not bent at the knee) and toes pointing forwards. Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Keeping your lower back on the floor extend one of your legs fully straight up to 90 degrees. At the same time lift your head and shoulders off the floor and reach both hands towards the lifted foot. The move should be slow and controlled, do not swing the leg and ensure you are lifting your shoulder blades off the floor. Your lower back must stay on the floor throughout. Slowly return to starting position.

Repeat x 15 (all on one leg then the other)

10. Sky sits

Lay back with your legs straight (not bent at the knee) and toes pointing forwards. Draw your belly button in so that your lower back touches the floor at all times. Lift your head and shoulders off the floor and reach both hands towards the sky. Your arms should be straight. The move should be slow and controlled, ensure you are lifting your shoulder blades off the floor. Your lower back must stay on the floor throughout. Slowly return to starting position.

Repeat x 20 (all centre)