

Returning to running after having a baby



Patient Information

Returning to sport has many mental and physical benefits. Running is a high impact exercise, and it is very important your return to running is planned with care.

Running requires good lower limb strength and pelvic floor control, therefore it is not recommended to return to running before 12 weeks.

We recommend a graded return to exercise. Your recovery and rate at which you build up exercises will vary depending on mode of delivery and from person to person.

In the first few weeks, start with basic pelvic floor exercises, breathing, gentle walking and gentle core strengthening and build up to low impact strength exercise. Please see POGP (pelvic obstetric and gynaecological physiotherapy) leaflet on 'exercise and advise after pregnancy' [Exercise and Advice After Pregnancy | POGP \(thepogp.co.uk\)](https://thepogp.co.uk).

You may start swimming from 8-12 weeks if your c-section scar has healed or you have stopped bleeding.

At each step in this process, it is important you listen to your body and don't push yourself too hard. If you are feeling any of the following symptoms, please stop exercising and discuss the symptoms with your GP or pelvic health physiotherapist.

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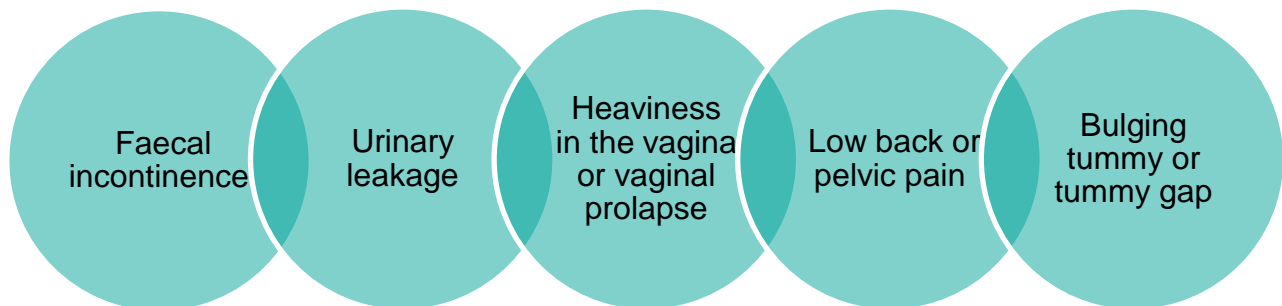
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Am I Ready?



Once 12 weeks has passed since the birth, and you have followed the advice above, and you feel ready, you may still feel unsure whether you are ready to return to running. Complete the tests below to know if you are ready. Ideally, you need to be able to answer 'Yes' to everything listed before starting a graded return to running programme.

Test 1

- Is your BMI less than 30? If your BMI is more than 30 please consult your GP for help with reducing your weight prior to embarking on a running programme. Check your BMI by visiting www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator.

Test 2

- Can you do a pelvic floor contraction for 8-12 seconds in standing 10 times? Can you do 10 fast pelvic floor contractions in standing? It is always best to have this confirmed by a Pelvic Health Physiotherapist with a vaginal examination.

Test 3

- Do you have a separation of your tummy muscles that is less than 2cm with no bulging? (A doctor, physiotherapist or midwife will be able to assess this for you).

Test 4



- ☐ Can you walk for 30 minutes symptom free?
- ☐ Can you stand on one leg for 10 seconds symptom free?
- ☐ Can you carry out 10 single knee bends on each leg without symptoms?
- ☐ Can you jog on the spot for a minute?
- ☐ Can you hop 10 times on each leg without symptoms?
- ☐ Can you carry out any forward jumping 10 times without symptoms?

Test 5



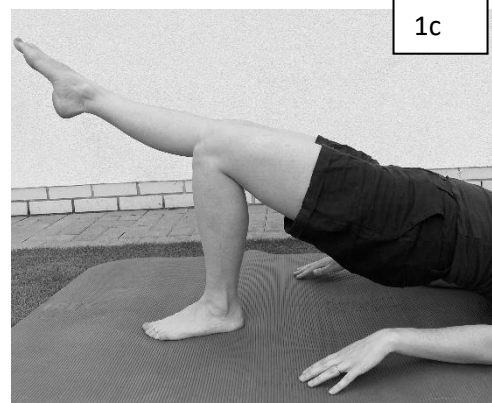
- ☐ Single leg calf raise - 20 times on each leg with good stability
- ☐ Single leg sit to stand – 20 times on each leg
- ☐ Side lying abduction – 20 times on each leg
- ☐ Single leg bridge - 20 times on each leg

The exercises in Test 5 are a great starting point for getting back to running strength. Most people don't start off being able to do them all. Below are some instructions for doing these exercises correctly, and some easier versions to get you ready for running.

Exercises:

1. Bridges

- a) Double Leg Bridge: Lay on your back with your hands by your sides, your knees bent and both feet flat on the floor. Tighten your abdominal and buttock muscles then raise your hips up to create a straight line from your knees to shoulders. Roll down slowly through your spine from top to bottom. Build up to 20 repetitions
- b) Progress to a hold: Stay in your bridge and take 5-10 breaths before rolling down and repeating as above.
- c) Single Leg Bridge: From the double leg bridge position, extend one leg while keeping your pelvis raised and level. Raise and lower your pelvis with control. Build up to 20 repetitions. Repeat on the other side.



2. Side Lying abduction

- a) Lying on your side supporting yourself on your elbow. Legs extended one on top of the other use your arm to support yourself in front. Keeping top leg straight lift it up towards the ceiling, stop and hold the position for two seconds. Make sure the leg stays in line with your body and toes point forwards. Slowly lower your leg to its starting position, keeping it straight and stacked directly above the lower leg. Build up to 20 repetitions.
- b) Add an ankle weight if you want more challenge.



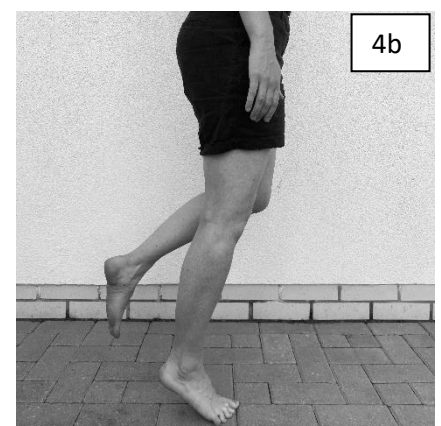
3. Sit to stand

- a) Start with both feet on the floor. Squat down by moving hips backwards and down. Maintain neutral position in your spine. As soon as you can feel the seat under your buttocks push up back to standing. Build up to at least 20 of these before trying a single leg version.
- b) Stand tall on one leg in front of a chair. Squat down by moving hips backwards and down. Maintain neutral position in your spine. As soon as you can feel the seat under your buttocks push up back to standing. Keep your knee over your second toe on the supporting leg. Build up to 20 repetitions.

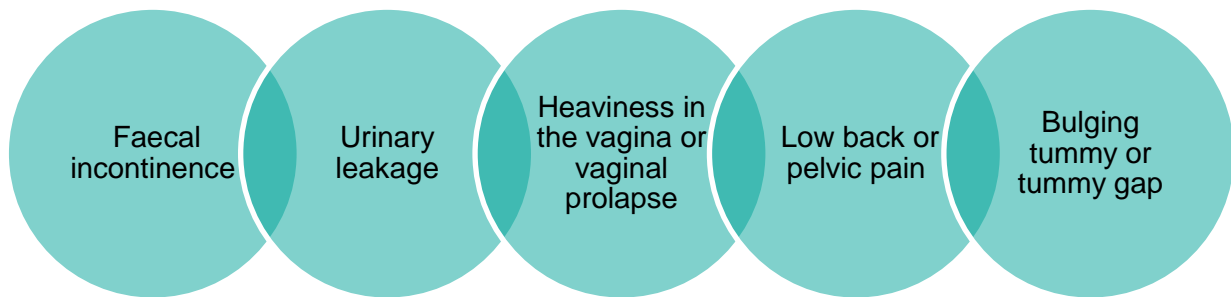


4. Calf raises

- a) Stand with feet hip width apart. Take support if needed. Rise right up onto your toes, not allowing the ankles to drop outwards. Slowly return to the starting position. Build up to at least 20 repetitions.
- b) Stand tall on one leg, with weight evenly on your foot and toes pointing forwards. Balance and rise onto your toes. In a controlled manner return to the starting position, use your arms to help with balance or take support if needed. This is a single leg calf raise.



Once you have passed all of these tests (and your baby is at least 12 weeks old) you are ready to try running. But remember, if you have any of the following symptoms, please stop running and ask your GP for advice and a referral to your local Pelvic Health Physiotherapist:



Useful References:

Goom, Tom & Donnelly, Grainne & Brockwell, Emma. (2019). Returning to running postnatal – guidelines for medical, health and fitness professionals managing this population. 10.13140/RG.2.2.35256.90880/2.

This leaflet has been amended and reproduced with thanks to the Royal United Hospital Pelvic Health Team (Author: Harriet Peatman, Returning to running after having a baby, Date of Publication July 2021, RUH PHY/047)

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Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 123 7797 and whc.pals@nhs.net

Patient and Public Involvement

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at

ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net or telephone 01249 454386.