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New mothers have enough on their plate without pressure to regain their pre-baby bodies as fast as a Hollywood celebrity. **Leah Simmons** of Pilates Moves has put together this quick, realistic at-home Pilates routine, exclusively for *Studio Bambini*.

Post-natal Pilates

So, you've had your baby. He/she has slot into a perfect rhythm of eating and sleeping. Your house is sparkling, your fridge is full, and a pig just flew past my window. Who are we kidding? A good day is getting yourself out of your pyjamas and eating something that's not out of a packet. The very thought of even trying to get out of the house to do any exercise sends a shiver down your aching spine.

Now that it isn't just ourselves we're looking after, we need to do what we can in a timeframe that we can manage – even if that's 15 minutes on the living-room floor while baby is in the bassinet.

This is the beauty of Pilates. It is the 'time-poor' person's perfect workout. Gentle and effective? Tick. Low-impact and non-aerobic? Tick. Targets those now non-existent pelvic floor muscles? Tick. Tick. Tick!

After having a baby your body is going through huge changes – from breast milk production to spiking hormone levels to quite possibly recovering from a surgical procedure. So, first and foremost, consult with your GP before you start exercising and consider that the generally accepted wait-time is six weeks for a natural birth and eight weeks for a caesarean.

One fairly common post-baby issue that is important to address is abdominal separation, or diastasis recti, where the right and left sides of the abdominal wall separate

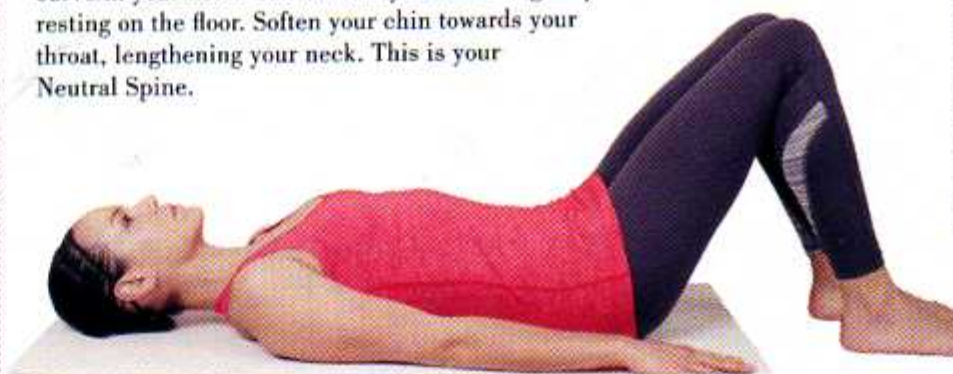
1. Neutral Pelvis/Neutral Spine

The Neutral Pelvis/Neutral Spine position is the basis of Pilates. Establishing the correct position will help you to master each exercise safely. It is optimal to work out on a surface that is comfortable but firm, e.g. an exercise mat or a couple of towels laid on the floor.

Lie on your back with your arms by your side and your feet flat on the floor, knees bent up to a 90 degree angle. Starting with your feet together, slowly separate your heels keeping your toes together, then bring the toes out in line with your heels. This establishes your unique parallel position in which your feet, ankles, knees and hips are all in one line.

Breathing naturally, start to rock your pelvis gently forwards and backwards, tucking and arching, warming up the muscles in your lower back and your abdominals. Repeat five times. Then relax and allow your pelvis to settle into a position between your tuck and your arch. Your hipbones and your pubic bone should be on the same horizontal plane. This is your Neutral Pelvis.

Now focus your awareness on your spine. Notice that your tailbone is resting gently on the floor. As you journey up through your spine, notice the natural curve in your lower back. The back of your ribcage is relaxed and resting on the floor and there is a gentle curve in your neck. The back of your head is gently resting on the floor. Soften your chin towards your throat, lengthening your neck. This is your Neutral Spine.



along the linea alba (that lovely dark line that suddenly appears down the centre of your belly). Diastasis recti reduces the integrity and functional strength of the abdominal wall and can aggravate lower back pain and pelvic instability.

Unfortunately, flurries of misconception swirl around abdominal separation and how to exercise the area safely during and after pregnancy. You're likely to encounter a thousand contradicting opinions about how to recondition your abs. Some of these opinions can, quite frankly, freak you out, while others, such as "just do a lot of crunches", can actually make the condition worse.

There is nothing to be afraid of, however, if you strengthen from the inside out. This means working the deep core muscles that traverse your midline. These are the muscles that support your lower back and pelvis, so it's crucial to exercise them safely.

Regaining your sexy hourglass figure (and gaining a bottom like Pippa Middleton's along the way...) is achievable if you are patient, consistent and listen to your body. It took nine months to for your body to expand to accommodate your bub. It could take at least that and then some to gain control of it again.

Here is a simple and effective program you can do at home that will help you reconnect with your body, tighten those muscles and get those endorphins flowing!

Please note: exercises 5, 6, 7 and 8 have a variety of progressions that you can work towards when you feel your body is ready to up the ante!

Leah Simmons teaches at Pilates Moves Studio, Double Bay, Sydney (www.pilatesmoves.com). She has a 2-year-old son, Ryder. If you would like any further information, email leah@thelandingpad.com.au

2. Pelvic Floor Muscle Contractions

Focus: pelvic floor muscles

Bring your awareness to your pelvic floor muscles. These are the muscles that you engage if you want to stop the flow of urine.

With your eyes closed and your mind focused, slowly contract and release your pelvic floor muscles 10 times. Then practise holding the contraction for 10 seconds at a time, three times.

Repetitions: complete this sequence five times.

3. The Pelvic Roll Up

Focus: spinal articulation and flexibility

Lie on your back in your Neutral Pelvis/Neutral Spine position. Breathe in to prepare. As you breathe out, gently press your lower back into the floor, tuck your pelvis under and lift your tailbone into the air. Roll each vertebra up off the floor one at a time until you are one long line from your knees to your ankles. Breathe in to hold the position, squeezing your bottom.

As you breathe out, roll each vertebra back down to the floor one at a time, finishing in the start position.

Repetitions: three



4. Leg Circles

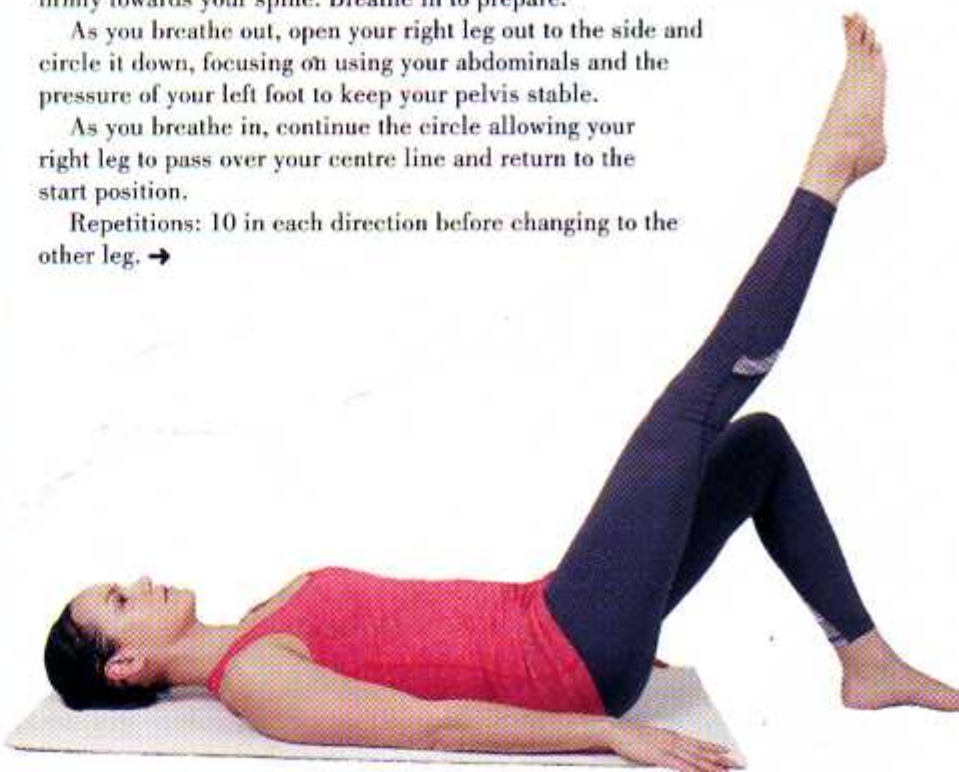
Focus: pelvic stability and front of thighs

Lie on your back in your Neutral Pelvis/Neutral Spine position with your arms by your side, palms down. Keep your left knee bent so your left foot is flat on the floor. Stretch your right leg into the air and hold it straight, ensuring that you can comfortably maintain a neutral spine. Draw your navel firmly towards your spine. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, open your right leg out to the side and circle it down, focusing on using your abdominals and the pressure of your left foot to keep your pelvis stable.

As you breathe in, continue the circle allowing your right leg to pass over your centre line and return to the start position.

Repetitions: 10 in each direction before changing to the other leg. →



5. Basic Core Strengthening Workout

Knee Floats

Lie on your back in your Neutral Pelvis/Neutral Spine position with your arms by your sides, palms down. Draw your navel down towards your spine, narrowing your waist.

As you breathe in, carefully float your right knee up into a tabletop position keeping your 90 degree angle at your knee joint. As you breathe out, place your right foot back on the floor.

Repetitions: five each side, alternating.



Progression 1: Toe Dips

Start in the same position as above. Float your right knee up into a tabletop position, followed by your left knee so that you have a 90 degree angle at both your hips and your knees. Draw your navel firmly towards your spine. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, gently lower your right toe tip to the floor keeping the right angle at your knee joint. As you breathe in, lift your knee back to the start position.

Repetitions: five each side, alternating.



Progression 2: Single Leg Stretch

Start as above with knees in tabletop, arms relaxed down by your sides and navel firmly drawn towards your spine. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, extend your right leg out straight, keeping the toes of both feet on the same plane. As you breathe in, draw your right leg back into the tabletop position.

Repetitions: five each side, alternating.



Progression 3: Double Leg Stretch

Start as above with knees in tabletop, arms relaxed down by your sides and navel firmly drawn towards your spine. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, extend both legs out straight at an angle that feels safe for your lower back, without too much pressure on your abdominals. As you breathe in, draw your legs back into the tabletop position.

Repetitions: 10



6. The Plank!

Focus: abdominals, shoulder stability and back muscles

Beginner version

Make sure you have adequate padding for your knees. Come down onto your forearms with your hands clasped together and your elbows directly underneath your shoulder joints. This should resemble a triangle shape.

Ensure that your navel is drawn firmly up towards your spine, your tailbone is tucked under and that you are not collapsing in your lower back. Your toes can either be in the air or on the floor tucked under your feet – whichever version is most comfortable for you. Imagine that your body is one

long line from your shoulders down to your knees. Your gaze is to your hands; the back of your neck is long.

Breathe slowly and try and fill the back of your lungs and your side ribs with each breath. Hold this position for 10 seconds, then 20 seconds, increasing each hold by 10 seconds until you are holding comfortably for one minute. Once you are able to hold this plank for one minute with no discomfort, you are ready to tackle the next version!

Advanced version

Start on your knees and place your palms on the floor, with the heels of your palms lined up with the middle of your ribs. Spread your fingers and then imagine picking the floor up with your hands. Keeping pressure through the fingers will help alleviate any wrist discomfort. With your toes tucked under your feet, lift your knees off the floor, firming the front of your thighs and your kneecaps. Squeeze your inner thighs towards each other and draw your navel firmly towards your spine.

Breathing naturally, keep your gaze focused on the floor between your hands and try to hold this plank position for 10 seconds. Then 20 seconds. Build your time as above.

7. Side Bend

Focus: lateral stabilisation, balance and control, side and back muscles.

Beginner version

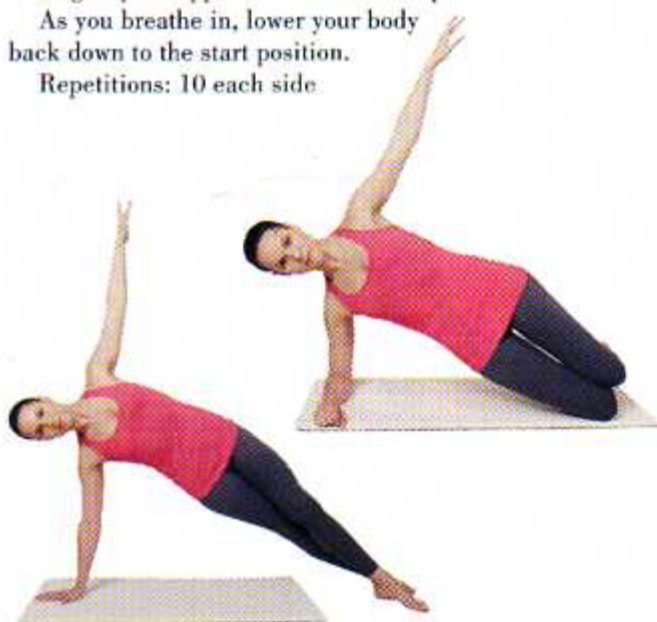
Sit on your right hip with your feet, ankles and knees together. Bend your knees to 90 degrees and lean on your right forearm with your left arm relaxed down your left thigh.

Make sure that your neck is in line with your spine, your right shoulder is down away from your ear and your underneath waist is lifted. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, use your underneath waist to lift your body into the air, keeping your knees down so that you resemble an arc. Your top arm lifts to the ceiling so your upper arms are in a "T" position.

As you breathe in, lower your body back down to the start position.

Repetitions: 10 each side



Advanced Version

Sit on your right hip and place your right hand on the floor beside you, with your fingers pointing away from your body and the heel of your palm approximately two feet away from your shoulder. Stretch your left arm out to the other side at chest height with your elbow slightly bent and your palm facing up, create a flowing curve in your arm. Look towards your left hand. Bend both legs a little and place your left foot in front and flat on the floor, with your knee pointing up towards the ceiling. Draw your navel towards your spine. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, press the heel of your right palm firmly into the floor and shift your body weight over your wrist to the right as you lift your body, until there is one long incline from the crown of your head to your feet. Your left arm lifts to create a "T" shape and your gaze is towards your right hand.

As you breathe in, slowly lower yourself back to the start position.

Repetitions: 10 each side

NB: If you feel any discomfort in your wrists, this version can also be done off the forearm.



8. Standing Clams

Focus: pelvic stability and bottom!

This exercise is best done in front of a mirror so that you can ensure your hips stay even and your pelvis is stable.

Clam 1

Start with your left foot firmly planted into the floor and your right toe tip against your left ankle. Imagine there is a hot poker underneath your left bottom cheek and keep your bottom squeezing and lifted. Ensure you are not sinking into your left hip. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, slowly open your right knee out to the side until you feel your right bottom cheek engaged. As you breathe in, return your knee to the start position.

Repetitions: 20 each side

Clam 2

Start as for Clam 1, however your right toe tip is now resting against the inside of your left knee. Again, check your hip position and ensure your bottom muscles are engaged. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, open your right knee out to the side, keeping your pelvis still and stable. As you breathe in, return your knee to the start position.

Repetitions: 20 each side

Clam 3

Start as for Clam 1. Breathe in to prepare.

As you breathe out, open your right knee out to the side and then extend your right leg out to straight, firming the muscles around your kneecap and thigh. As you breathe in, bend your right knee so your toe tip touches your left ankle again and return your knee to the start position.

Repetitions: 20 each side ■