

# Stretching and Strengthening Exercises After Your Baby Is Born

The first 6 strengthening and stretching exercises can be done right away if your provider says it's OK and you carefully follow any precautions.

- **Abdominal drawing-in maneuver:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Try to pull your belly button in towards your spine. Hold this position for 15 seconds and then relax. Repeat 5 to 10 times.
- **Side-lying leg lift:** Lying on your side, tighten the front thigh muscles of your top leg and lift that leg 8 to 10 inches (20 to 25 centimeters) away from the other leg. Keep the leg straight and lower it slowly. Do 2 sets of 15 on each side.
- **Side-lying leg lift, cross over:** Lie on your side with your top leg bent and your foot placed in front of the bottom leg. Keep your bottom leg straight. Raise your bottom leg as far as you can comfortably and hold it for 5 seconds. Keep your hips still while you are lift your leg. Hold this position for 5 seconds and then slowly lower your leg. Do 2 sets of 15 on each side.
- **Quadruped arm and leg raise:** Get down on your hands and knees. Pull in your belly button and tighten your abdominal muscles to stiffen your spine. While keeping your abdominals tight, raise one arm and the opposite leg away from you. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Lower your arm and leg slowly and change sides. Do this 10 times on each side.
- **Wall squat:** Stand with your back to a wall and your shoulders and head against the wall. Look straight ahead. Keep your shoulders relaxed and your feet about 3 feet from the wall and shoulder's width apart. Slowly slide your body down the wall until the tops of your thighs are parallel to the floor. Hold 10 seconds and then slowly slide back up the wall. Repeat 10 times and work up to 2 sets of 15.

This exercise is more comfortable if you place a soccer-sized ball behind your back.

- **Clam exercise:** Lie on your side with your hips and knees bent and feet together. Slowly raise your top leg toward the ceiling while keeping your heels touching each other. Hold for 2 seconds and lower slowly. Do 2 sets of 15 repetitions on each side.

When your healthcare provider says it's OK, you can start strengthening your abdominal muscles by adding these exercises:

- **Partial curl:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Draw in your abdomen and tighten your stomach muscles. With your hands stretched out in front of you, curl your upper body forward until your shoulders clear the floor. Hold this position for 3 seconds. Don't hold your breath. It helps to breathe out as you lift your shoulders. Relax back to the floor. Repeat 10 times. Build to 2 sets of 15. To challenge yourself, clasp your hands behind your head and keep your elbows out to your sides.

- **Diagonal curl:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Stretch your arms out in front of you or clasp your hands behind your neck to support your head. Draw in your abdomen and lift your head and shoulders off the floor while rotating your trunk toward the right. Make sure you don't use your arms to lift your body off the floor. Hold this position for 3 seconds. Return to the starting position. Then lift your head and shoulders and rotate toward your left side. Repeat this exercise 15 times on each side. Do 2 sets of 15.
- **Dead bug:** Lie on your back with your knees bent, arms at your sides, and feet flat on the floor. Draw in your abdomen and tighten your abdominal muscles. While keeping your abdominal muscles tight and knees bent, lift one leg several inches off the floor, hold for 5 seconds, and then lower it. Repeat this exercise with the opposite leg. Then lift your arm over your head, hold for 5 seconds, and then lower it. Repeat with the opposite arm. Do 5 repetitions with each leg and arm.

Once this exercise gets easy, raise one leg and the opposite arm together. Hold for 5 seconds. Lower your arm and leg and raise the opposite arm and leg up and hold for 5 seconds. Do 3 sets of 5 repetitions.

- **The plank:** Lie on your stomach resting on your forearms. With your legs straight, lift your hips off the floor until they are in line with your shoulders. Support yourself on your forearms and toes. Hold this position for 15 seconds. (If this is too difficult, you can modify it by placing your knees on the floor.) Repeat 3 times. Work up to increasing your hold time to 30 to 60 seconds.

Another important exercise after pregnancy is the Kegel exercise. It strengthens your pelvic muscles. You can do Kegels anywhere--while you sit at a desk, wait for a bus, wash dishes, drive a car, wait in line, or watch TV. No one will know you are doing them. Here's how you do them:

- You can feel the muscles that need to be exercised by squeezing the muscles in your genital area. You might find that it helps to pretend you are contracting the pelvic muscles to stop a flow of urine or stop from passing gas.
- Squeeze your pelvic muscles and hold the contraction for 3 to 5 seconds. Do this 10 to 20 times. Let the muscles relax completely between contractions. Do these sets of contractions 3 to 4 times a day.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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Abdominal drawing in



Side-lying leg lift (cross over)



Wall squat



Side-lying leg lift



Quadruped arm/leg raise



Clam exercise

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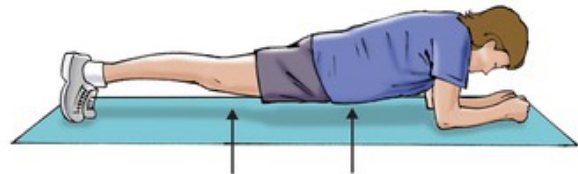
Partial curl



Diagonal curl



Dead bug



The plank