

6 Exercises

FOR THE FIRST 6 WEEKS

6 EXERCISES + GUIDANCE FOR
THE POSTPARTUM ATHLETE



BRIANNA BATTLES



About Your Coach

Brianna Battles is the Founder of Pregnancy & Postpartum Athleticism and CEO of Everyday Battles LLC.

She specializes in coaching pregnant and postpartum athletes, as well as educating coaching professionals on how to help athletes navigate the physical and mental considerations of training during these chapters in a woman's life. She is a relentless advocate and relatable resource for women who want training during pregnancy and make a sustainable return to performance, lifestyle, function, career, and activity postpartum (and postpartum is forever)! This effort is what led to her creating a curriculum for her colleagues- coaches and practitioners- who also want to support athletes through this process.



Brianna has well established, successful online education, programs, and resources for fitness professionals, practitioners, and athletes. She has built an international team of P&PA Coaches who are equipped to work with pregnant and postpartum athletes in their communities and online.

She has experience coaching a variety of athletes, ranging from professional and collegiate athletes to the recreational exerciser. This is how she cultivated a top-down approach to her coaching culture. She has helped many athletes manage core, pelvic health, orthopedic and other physical challenges while still encouraging their athletic goals and pursuits.

Brianna has her Master's Degree in Coaching and Athletic Administration and her Bachelor's degree in Kinesiology. She is an active member of the NSCA where she is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS), and a USAW Sports Performance Coach. She has completed multiple continuing education courses and mentorships in the women's health and strength and conditioning realm.

She lives in Southern California with her husband and 2 sons (Cade and Chance).



Disclaimer

*This guidance is NOT medical advice and all pregnancies, birth methods and recoveries vary by individual and experience. It is highly suggested to prioritize rest above stress. For at least the first six weeks postpartum, keep activity levels low to moderate and know that less is more right now even if it seems counterintuitive.



**IT'S YOUR BRAIN
THAT FEELS
READY,
NOT YOUR BODY**

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Intro

WHEN CAN I START EXERCISING POSTPARTUM?

The early weeks postpartum can be an overwhelming time of adjusting to a new baby and healing from pregnancy and delivery. As a coach that has worked with numerous postpartum athletes of all different interests and abilities, I'm used to being asked, "so when can I start exercising again?!"

"When can I return to exercise?"

"I feel fine – can I do ____ again?!"

"I want to do something."

I am a big "all or something" fan, but I also know that sometimes, especially in the early weeks of caring for a newborn, the "something" is caring for the baby and not much else.

TO BE CLEAR:

This guidance is here for those of you who want the **something,** but it's **NOT** a **necessity**. Acclimating to your new baby and life is the main priority. Your body is healing in a multitude of ways right now from the inside out. Taking the time to be intentional and restorative with everything, allows for the greater intensity of daily life, exercise and your goals later on.



HOW DO YOU FEEL?

Check in with your postpartum self and know that this will vary day to day, week by week and month to month.

- Are you getting enough sleep?

(ha, I KNOW. However, sleep/rest is critical to prioritize over exercise right now. You may be used to 5am workouts, but that's likely not complementary to your current needs)

- Are you keeping hydrated?
- Are you eating enough nourishing food?
- How are your relationships and support?
- How is your mental health?

Anxiety, depression and trauma are VERY common postpartum and there's help.

- How does your vagina feel? What happened during delivery? Do you know if you tore? What degree? Intervention, etc? Gather context from your Doctor or midwife to confirm details.
- How long did you push for?
- Did you have a Caesarean section? Was this an emergency csection? Was it planned? How does your incision feel?
- What was your labor like, if any?
- Have you processed your birth story yet?
- Are you working with a Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist (PFPT) either virtually or have an appointment scheduled yet?

If not, schedule this appointment ASAP for feedback on what your body has been through from the inside out. This assessment can significantly improve your core, pelvic health, self-awareness and fitness.



People tend to forget to take into account the entirety of the experience and ONLY focus on the birth method. It is all relevant and influences recovery. If you feel guilt or stigma over what your birth method means, remember, there's no such thing as the right way or best way to give birth. It's not the delivery method that dictates "best or right," it's the circumstance and individual experience with accompanying emotions that does.

BOTH vaginal and cesarean births carry significant recovery processes and have physical, mental and emotional considerations.

Postpartum is a fairly equal playing field, there is no "green light" birth method, so take your time, adjust and reintegrate wisely, intuitively and with support from the inside out.

Maybe you're not sure how you feel. Perhaps you feel great! Perhaps you feel intimidated by your unfamiliar body. It's ok, because these movements and guidelines will help meet in the middle of guiding readiness.

Listen to the voice you typically try to ignore. It's not about what you "should" be doing right now, or pushing through, it's about what is appropriate for your body and needs TODAY, THIS WEEK, THIS SEASON OF LIFE. A quote I share a lot with my new moms is, "it's your brain that feels ready, not your body."

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Recovering from pregnancy and birth is a big deal and it's important for your long term function and athleticism.

There's no such thing as a simple, uncomplicated, no big deal birth.

The physiological process of birth is a significant event for your body and mind. It may be tempting to compare your experience, body, recovery or goals to others, but that takes away from the opportunity to embrace your own unique process.



WHAT CAN I DO POSTPARTUM?

Get familiar with your new body.

Your body has endured significant changes for close to a year. It can be hard to see the temporary and sometimes permanent changes. This is something we can recognize and navigate imperfectly, while also recognizing our worth beyond aesthetics and ability.

Use the following steps to help assess and understand your postpartum body to build the foundation for your rehabilitation.

STEP 1: WHAT ARE YOUR MOST TYPICAL POSITIONS?

How are you sitting? Standing? Holding the baby? How do you feel in these positions?

Tune into any discomfort, adjust the position, see if that changes your experience.

Example 1: if you're leaning back, squeezing your glutes and holding your baby (did you even realize you were squeezing your glutes?) shift your body weight forward, let your glutes unclench.

How does that feel? Take a mental note.

Example 2: You're in the shower (finally alone!) Are you sucking in your stomach? Let it go. Is that hard to do? Try and let it go more. Take a slow 5ish second breath in and just let.it.go. It's totally ok to look like you had a baby. You did.

How you hold tension in your abs, glutes, pelvic floor and body in general matters. When you feel "squishy," it's tempting to generate more tension for a braced/support feeling (squeezing, breath holding, etc). It's a great time to understand your tendencies and counter them when needed.

We are amazing at compensating and there's of course a time and place for our bodies to adapt and react, but right now, the goal is to reacclimate to a new normal and find some coordination between how we breathe, move and how it may help in our core and pelvic floor healing process.



STEP 2: HOW IS YOUR BREATHING COORDINATED?

Let's shift the focus to coordination, lengthening and shortening of all muscles, starting with the diaphragm.

When you inhale, your belly should expand/give way (making room for the diaphragm to go down), this reduces tension in the pelvic floor and abdominal wall.

When you exhale, the diaphragm travels back up, and the pelvic floor gently recoils/contracts following the diaphragm's lead. The transverse abdominals, creates a "force" across the midline. This does not "close" your abs, but it does help create tension in the linea alba from the intentional contraction. The tension generated helps with generating strength and adaptation to the system.

This connection between your breath and the base of your core, aka your pelvic floor, and your abs matter. The breath helps facilitate coordination, intention, and awareness of tendencies. It's not the end-all-be-all

of healing and rehab, but it is a foundation to be in tune with because it's how we add movement, improve/manage symptoms and overall familiarity with our postpartum body.



STEP 3: TRY SOME MOVEMENT.

8 reps/exercise. Do this rehab circuit one time a day or every couple days.

Here are some movements that can help your BRAIN coordinate with your healing body.



Exercises

PRONE (AKA LAYING ON YOUR STOMACH) BREATHING 8 BREATHS



[Watch the video here.](#)

Ok, so try not to fall asleep. 😊

I like this exercise because the ground gives you feedback.

It can be difficult to breathe into your belly and get a full breath, so breathing into the ground, feeling it against your stomach, gives your BRAIN the feedback regarding how much range of motion is happening with each rep (aka breath).

Inhale into the ground laying face down, let your butt relax (no clenching!), and gently exhale, feeling your stomach gently lift away from the ground (still touching) in response to your exhale. It will slowly shift away from the ground through the exhale, as the abs engage.

When you exhale, try to gently engage your pelvic floor. I like the cue of imaging drawing your belly button up toward your ribs. Do you feel supported in your vagina? Do you feel pressure?

Perhaps you feel like your pelvic floor is already “on” and can’t really feel a lift because maybe it’s already gripping.

If this is you, just focus on quality breaths and don’t stress about doing Kegels or a lot of pelvic floor work. Think about your stomach letting go/relaxing and breathing into your ribs.



SUPINE (AKA, LAYING ON YOUR BACK) BREATHING 8 BREATHS



[Watch the video here.](#)

This is a good foundational breath. Creating simple awareness here helps translate the breath/abs/pelvic floor coordination into these exercises and future ones.

Put your hands on your stomach and inhale into them feeling your mid and lower abdomen expand into your hands. You can imagine breathing sideways into ribs, and/or inhaling into your hip bones. Take a slow breath, feeling your lower and mid-abdomen gently rise into your hands,

Exhale and feel your breath draw up and away from your pelvic floor, releasing through your mouth. Your abs may gently draw inward, away from your hands. Exhale like you're blowing through a straw.



GLUTE BRIDGE 8 REPS



[Watch the video here.](#)

For this particular glute bridge exercise, your feet are going to be together. As you lift your hips off the ground, exhale gently, soliciting gentle core engagement. Your foot position may help you feel more pelvic floor connection.

Remember, pelvic floor engagement is only good when it is also able to relax (lengthen), so as you lower your hips down to the ground, let your stomach, glutes and pelvic floor reset at the bottom with your inhale. If this is uncomfortable, you may adjust your feet to being hip width apart to see if that feels better.



MARCHING 8 TOTAL (4/SIDE)



[Watch the video here.](#)

Supine marching takes a lot of control, even though it can easily be a rushed and overlooked movement. The goal of this movement is to feel the differences in control between each side of your body. Lay on your back, hands on your stomach. As you gently exhale, lift your foot off the ground a few inches without shifting/rocking your pelvis to the side. This takes a lot of control and focus on proper engagement. If one side feels more difficult than the other, OR if it's hard to maintain control without shifting, try to use your pelvic floor muscles more and wait a couple of seconds before beginning the rep.

Control > speed or amount of reps performed. Let your stomach and pelvic floor rest on inhale before switching legs.



ROCKING 8 REPS



[Watch the video here.](#)

Get on all fours and distribute your body weight evenly. Your weight should be balanced, not shifted toward your arms. Once you find a neutral position, let your stomach completely relax into a hanging position. This is a great position to let go of tension in your abs and pelvic floor.

From here, slowly exhale, focusing on drawing your belly button toward your rib cage, and/or bringing your hip bones together. Feel what your stomach does in response to your breath. Did it gently draw inward, generating a more supported feeling? When you inhale, let it go again to fully lengthen and relax your core system.

Now, after you've done a few connection breaths, add the rock. Gently shift your body weight forward on your exhale and you should feel some gentle support around your core, generated by your exhale and shifted movement. That exhale "kicks on" your abs as you move forward, and then reset at the center. The exhale guides the rock forward and back to center.

At the center, let your stomach relax and reset.



SQUATS 8 REPS



[Watch the video here.](#)

Squats can be done to the depth you are comfortable with, or using a device for support (sitting down to a couch, using assistance from a PVC pipe placed in front of you, etc.

As much as a squat can feel intimidating after birth, it's something we do to use the restroom and sit up and down. Managing symptoms, tendencies, and control assists in the recovery process.

While standing, shift your body weight so that it's evenly distributed across your feet. Let your belly and glutes let go of any tension they are holding in your neutral standing position, ribs stacked over your pelvis.

Inhale (feeling the expansion into your rib cage and stomach) and then gently exhale (feeling the gentle support from the bottom and around your center) and then begin to squat down.

Try to exhale through the full range of motion to generate the most support. When you return to standing, inhale and give your body a chance to reset, relaxing at the top. You do NOT need to squat low. Avoid your pelvis tipping under (referred to as butt wink), and squat to a controlled depth. When you stand up, finish in a neutral position, there's no need to squeeze your glutes at the end range/top.



Looking for More?

In conclusion, finally, I want you to have a less is more approach to your early weeks postpartum. Do these movements when you can, not because you have to. If you're looking for more guidance on how to integrate and progress your rehab into a fitness routine, check out my [8 Week Postpartum Athlete Training Program](#). This program has helped thousands of women rehab and rebuild their postpartum training and body with confidence, strength and intention.

If you've read through this, you're already SO far ahead of the game in terms of awareness and support. You're doing a great job and you will continue to progress in so many ways. I am here to support you during this special time in your athleticism and parenthood.

I am with you,

Bri



[CLICK TO VIEW THE
8-WEEK PROGRAM](#)

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