

# Postnatal Bodies.

Shouldn't the joy of having a new baby outweigh any of the discomforts we might feel in our postnatal bodies? In the aftermath of childbirth, many exhausted mummies feel blindsided by an assault of physical changes as fluctuations in hormones, sleep deprivation, hair loss, puffiness, loose skin, stretch marks, changes in energy and appetite that throw off the body's reliable responses to mood and weight management.

Sadly, we live in a society and culture that tells us to 'love every part of being a mum' is also the same one that screams in our face, 'Why haven't you bounced back yet from having your baby?' or another firm favourite - get your body back after pregnancy! Um...hold up for 1 minute, you didn't lose your body somewhere along the way, it might look different, but it's still the same body, so please don't let anyone tell you to "get your body back. and we're not balls - we do not bounce anywhere!

Somewhere along the way, you might have believed that your body was supposed to look the same forever. The media and all the celebrities in the spotlight don't help matters at all!

Here's the God-honest truth: all bodies change, and it's been that way since the day you were born and will be that way until the day you die.

Your body wasn't the same at 5 as it was at 15. It won't be the same at 30 as it was 20, or 40 as it was at 30. So, don't expect your body, post-baby to look the same as it did pre-baby. and your body won't be the same post-menopause as it was pre-menopause... and that's ok.

Juggling self-care after pregnancy with your newborn care is no mean feat. Studies have shown that the conflicting demands of vigilance and flexibility take a toll on new parents; as a consequence, many have unrealistic expectations for how much they can and should control their own postnatal bodies.

Remind yourself it's okay if there are things about your body that are different after having your body - maybe it's some extra weight, maybe your breasts are different, maybe you've got stretch marks or a scar, maybe your hips just seem a little wider, or the cellulite more prominent.

Bodies change, and ALL versions of your body are good.

Let go of the obsession with getting your body to look like you're 20 for the rest of your life. It's not serving you or your body image in the slightest.

Sadly, many new mummies feel like a complete failure for having a body that has been rightfully changed by the process of growing and birthing a baby.

While the physical changes are somewhat expected, what **isn't** normalized is the permanence of our postnatal body changes and I think this is where the fight in our heads starts.

## **Postnatal Body Changes Doesn't Determine Your Worth.**

Because of the strong connection between social media and body image, it's all too easy to get stuck into a comparison trap with other mothers who might be on a similar journey as you.

The problem with these expectations is that they're too often unrealistic and may create more frustration and angst toward yourself and your body.

While your identity may have been closely connected to your body size and appearance before you had your baby, these are not measures of your worth or value as a mother.

But remember: your body is supposed to change, and change is normal. This change is not reflective of your innate worth and value as a mother, woman and human being.

## **Shifting identities of self are at the root of body image challenges for new mums.**

Whether we're uncomfortable with our stretch marks, c section scars, or weak pelvic floor muscles, it's far easier for us to see our physical bodies than to have the clarity of mind to tap into what is happening emotionally. As a result, our body becomes the target of our uncertainties, something many women think about many times a day. I think the key to acceptance is to realise what our bodies actually created. We have these amazing, wonderful, perfect babies in our arms. Those scars and stretch marks are proof of the life you created - this is what needs to be celebrated.

## **Prioritise your healing, and don't put yourself last.**

Although our bodies will change multiple times over the course of our lives, we don't have to accept everything as just 'part of having babies'. I know you probably rolled your eyes if your LMC even suggested these things, but seriously, take the time to see a pelvic floor physical therapist, a sexual health therapist, check in with your health care provider

Women too often accept things as normal, when really, there are usually solutions!

Things you don't have to accept about your body just because you had a baby:

- peeing yourself when you sneeze, jump, or exercise
- unhealed diastasis recti (abdominal separation)
- pain with intercourse
- pelvic pain, hip back, back pain, vaginal heaviness, etc.

Figure out what triggers negative feelings about your body, and get rid of those things.

What triggers negative thoughts around your body? Some things you can't really change, but there is so much more in your control than out of your control than you might think.

- Is it the social media accounts you follow always promoting a certain beauty ideal? Unfollow them and find ones that embrace positive body acceptance
- Are certain conversations your friends have about their bodies, upsetting? Set boundaries, and change the subject
- Is it the environment in your gym? Find a different place to work out.
- Is it the number on the scale when you weigh yourself? Throw away the scale!

You are in charge of your thoughts, so if you don't like them, work to eliminate the triggers that start those negative thought cycles.

## **A Partner's Support Can Change the way you view yourself.**

Studies show that when women perceive that their partners support them, the satisfaction with their appearance increases. Women who felt criticized by their partners were less secure. The literature review shows men have an impact on how women perceive their identities. Having a loving and attentive partner who honors their new postpartum bodies is essential for feeling good in their own skin. One new father I spoke with said 'As someone who has struggled with body image from an early age, I recognised the changes my partner experienced. However, I have to admit, during that time, all I saw was the woman who carried our precious child. I can honestly say my attraction to her was heightened. Yes, bodies change. Every stretch mark, every scar tells a beautiful story. Our story. Nothing will change that; those memories are ours. These changes are part of our life together and, as such, only heightened my attraction to her'. So hopefully, you have a partner just as supportive.

## **These bodies of ours? They deserve to be honored and respected.**

Whether that means simply flipping the script in your head to the positive or seeking out professional help to overcome any issues, you and your body are worth it, you are beautiful! Rock that mum bod like the boss you are!!