

Bounce back after baby

There's no doubt childbirth can be a shock to the system but a host of services are there to help, as **Kylie Welsh** discovers

Celebrity 'yummy mummies' bounce back to their former slim-line figures within months of giving birth. Superstars Angelina Jolie, Nicole Kidman and Jessica Alba have all unveiled post-baby bodies that are the envy of women worldwide. Squeezing back into your favourite little black dress so soon after childbirth, however, is not realistic for new mums who don't have the luxury and expertise of a full-time dietician, nanny and personal trainer on hand 24/7.

New mums are often overwhelmed with their changed body shape and extra baby weight. According to fitness expert Angela Houseman, the average woman should not look to celebrities as role models. "It's inevitable that women will envy superstars who go from being nine months pregnant to a size six overnight," she says.

Houseman has had two children and understands the pressures that are placed on women who have just given birth. "When I had both my children I suffered envy when I read magazines of superstars who had given birth and looked terrific. But the reality is, the average person does not have a host of staff to help out with everyday living."

Amy Hopes, wife of Grinspoon drummer Kristian, knows only too well that childbirth isn't all you expect it to be. She gave birth to her first child six months ago and believes her inexperience is typical of most first-time mums. "I had the perfect pregnancy and presumed I would have the perfect birth. But I was in for a big shock. I had a terrible, gruelling 36-hour labour. In the end the doctors had to use suction to get the baby out. I was very traumatised by it and can really only now, after several months, start to re-live it in my mind," Amy recalls.

Amy, 32, found it shocking that professionals encouraged her not to talk about her traumatic birth, suggesting that she would upset other first-time mums. "When I went to see the midwife I burst into tears I was so overwhelmed. The midwife said, 'Don't tell other mums, you'll only put them off,' which was completely shocking to me. I think mums really need to know and understand what can happen both physically and mentally. It is not focusing on the negative, but preparing yourself for what might happen."

Surprisingly for Amy, it was the psychological impact of childbirth that



Amy Hopes and baby Harry smiling now after a traumatic birth

was most challenging. "Physically I recovered well and my post natal program was instrumental in that smooth recovery. I was very healthy and fit before I gave birth too, doing yoga exercises each day, and I think that helped."

Amy undertook the 30-day post natal recovery program with Embracing Motherhood, which aims to support mums in getting their body *and* mind back to a full recovery. According to Tania Flack from Embracing Motherhood, most new mums will go through dramatic changes both emotionally and physically before, during and after the birth process. The more mums look after themselves,

the greater are their chances of a recovery in both areas.

It is the norm in our culture for the attention to move away from the mum and onto the new born baby after childbirth, often to the detriment of the mum. In cultures such as Asia, South America, the Middle East and India there is recognition that mums will need a longer period of time to rest and recover after childbirth. This can range from a few weeks up to a few months for their rest and recovery.

"A woman's body can take as long to recover as it does to make a baby but, in particular, the six-week postnatal period

is extremely important for supporting new mums back to health,” Flack says. “Women who give birth go through a complete physical and emotional change and require enormous support during the postnatal period. Unfortunately, often society does not acknowledge this need.”

These are some of the more common changes women will notice after childbirth:

- Up to 20 percent of women have postnatal weight retention
- Up to 76 percent of new mums report ongoing fatigue in the postnatal period. Fatigue is a major contributor to depression.
- At least 15 percent of Australian mums suffer Post Natal Depression
- 83 percent of new mums initiate breastfeeding and less than 18 percent of mums continue to breastfeed after six months
- Approximately 50 percent of new mums report ongoing backache
- More than 40 percent of women have caesareans leading to longer recovery times.

With the assistance of her post natal program, Amy found she had plenty of support from the moment she arrived home. “The program really did make me feel secure. Over the four-week program there is constant phone support, a support guide to refer to, nutritional supplementation for your recovering body and a naturopath visits regularly to

ensure your energy levels are doing well. In week two a masseur comes to your home every day and gives you a massage which really eases your back pain. Having this time out was invaluable. You also have tummy wraps on overnight to help pull everything back together after childbirth.”

For a new mum, a feeling of isolation is inevitable. “The most important thing is knowing that someone is looking out for you and you are not on your own,” says Amy. “The problem is that if you do gain a lot of weight and you don’t bounce back easily, you are stuck at home and can’t get out to do any exercise. Then your weight gain can start to spiral. I think how fit and healthy you are before the baby comes has a lot to do with it.”

Weightwatchers Australia recommends that women gain between 11 to 16 kilos during pregnancy and indicate that too much weight gain affects your ability to bounce back after birth. Coming into pregnancy with excess weight can also make it harder to lose weight afterwards. To achieve a healthy pre-pregnancy weight, Weightwatchers suggests not gaining too much weight during pregnancy, making wise food choices and getting plenty of exercise in the months following delivery to maintain a healthy weight.

“If you put in the effort you will see your post baby body start to take shape again,” says personal trainer Andrea

‘Me time’ for mums

Spas: Mummabubba beauty spa in Windsor allows mums to have some serious pampering time while their baby is being minded.

Coffee break: An increasing number of child-friendly cafes, such as Cafe Mama at Windsor and Breathing Space at Kenmore, combine the much-deserved coffee break or lunch experience with child-minding so mums can relax.

Movies: ‘Babes in Arms’ has become very popular for mums who want to be able to go to the movies and enjoy some relaxing time without having to worry about disrupting other movie goers. Babes in Arms sessions are run regularly at Palace Centro in the Valley, Palace Barracks at Paddington, Birch Caroll and Coyle Cinemas Carindale,

Chermside, Garden City, Queen Street and Loganholme.

Gyms: Most gyms in Brisbane now offer childcare facilities so check at your local gym or find one close by that offers this.

Staying in touch: The Bub Hub (www.bubhub.com.au) is an online information centre for new parents. The site is endorsed by the Australian College of Midwives, the Australian Lactation Consultants Association and the Playgroup Association. It now has 40,000 registered users.

Playgroups: To find a local playgroup for you and your baby check out www.playgroupaustralia.com.au. It is a great way to get you out of the house and meet other new mums.

Solorzano. “Much of the recovery process is tied in with the mum’s body type and her level of fitness and health during the pregnancy. If you’ve really embraced the ‘eating for two’ concept, it is likely you have developed some bad eating habits during your pregnancy. Many mums think the weight will fall off but bad eating habits will make it hard to lose weight, especially when you are at home with your baby and are unable to get out and exercise. The isolation and uncertainty can make new mums ‘comfort eat’ too. When I get new mums to keep a food diary, they are often shocked out how much their eating habits have changed.”

Some women consider liposuction after childbirth to remove unwanted weight gain, especially their ‘baby tummy’.

However, Moka Skin and Body Technologies provides a new non-surgical fat blaster treatment as an alternative to liposuction. The treatment targets lumps and bumps all over the body. The fat blaster therapy uses ultrasound waves and heat waves to gently melt away the fat cells. It takes about three weeks before the results begin to show and it is also effective for cellulite reduction.

Physically and mentally new mums need to allow themselves time to recover and adjust after giving birth. It’s important to remember that *you* are just as important in the post-birth recovery process as your precious new baby. There is plenty of support available and, in the end, a happy and healthy mum will be a far more effective carer for her baby.