

Information for breastfeeding military mothers



PHYSICAL TRAINING & BREASTFEEDING

Maintaining physical readiness and weight standards is important for both military readiness and military appearance while in uniform. Physical training is essential to the health of military women during the childbearing years, and while breastfeeding may impact your postpartum physical readiness and weight standards, there are ways to overcome those challenges as shown below.

Weight Standards

All personnel in the military must adhere to weight standards, which are measured as part of the Body Composition Assessment (BCA) during the Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA) given twice a year. During pregnancy, and for 180 days after the date of delivery (1 year for Air Force personnel), weight standards are waived.

Some women find it hard to lose the weight gained during pregnancy which is most often due to fatigue, work schedules, or medical issues. Breastfeeding can also have an effect weight gain and loss as well. Breastfeeding results in 1-2 pounds of weight loss in the first 6 months, with slowed weight loss in the second 6 months, due to loss of body fat from the hips and thighs.

Most women are back to their pre-pregnancy weight within 5 months of giving birth. For some women, however, a portion of the pregnancy weight remains until they wean completely. This may be due to increased caloric intake, or it may be the body's way of ensuring that there is an adequate supply of fat for milk production.

Losing those last few pounds may be a problem if you are nearing the end of your 180-day waiver period. Diet and exercise often helps, but sometimes the weight just doesn't come off and weaning is the only answer. That is a choice only you can make!

Diet

If you are finding it hard to drop your weight to within standards, you may want to consider dieting. It is safe to diet while breastfeeding provided you follow some guidelines.

- An intake of about 1800-2500 calories is sufficient to promote natural, healthy weight loss of about 1-2 pounds a month.
- A safe weight-loss amount for a breastfeeding mother is no more than 1-1.5 pounds a week.
- Eat 3 nutritious meals a day, as well as a few healthy snacks.
- Eat foods in as close to their natural state as possible (try to stay away from snack machines and processed food).
- Drink water to thirst, especially if you are working in extreme heat or are exercising heavily. Too little or too much water can lead to decreased milk supply.
- Stay away from fad diets, energy drinks, weight loss pills, and shakes. They are not proven to work and may contain ingredients not safe for use when breastfeeding.

If you find that your weight loss has stalled, combine moderate exercise with a healthy diet. Mothers who diet *and* exercise have steadier and longer-lasting weight loss results than mothers who diet alone. *Do not drop the pounds too fast, many women find it lowers their milk supply drastically and can be difficult to rebuild.*

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PERSONAL USE ONLY

Exercise

All personnel in the military must do physical training (PT) in order to pass the bi-annual Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA). While pregnant you may have been required to participate in a modified physical fitness program, such as the P3T Program. Upon your return to full duty after convalescent leave, you will be required to participate in command physical fitness. As with the weight standards, you have 180 days (1 year for Air Force Personnel) pass your PFA.

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) advocate resuming exercise as soon as it is medically safe and you physically feel like it. For some women that may be within a few weeks of birth while other mothers will take the full 12 weeks of convalescent leave before they feel ready.

Gradually increase your exercise frequency, duration and intensity until you can do 30-60 minutes of medium-intensity aerobic exercise 3-6 times a week. In the first six weeks be sure to watch for signs of pain, or bright red vaginal bleeding, that means you are progressing too quickly. If you had a Caesarean you will need to go slower and pay particular attention to your abdominal muscles as they heal.

Some items to know:

- Milk supply is not affected by *moderate* exercise. Heavy/extreme exercise may lower supply.
- Milk flavor is not affected by *moderate* exercise. Heavy/extreme exercise may cause a buildup of lactic acid which might affect the taste.
- Breastfeed or pump right before high-intensity/impact exercises like running, jumping jacks to keep lactic acid levels low, and to prevent painful breasts and leaking.
- Wear a good quality sports bra made for breastfeeding mothers.
- Take a shower after exercising to remove sweat and body odor before breastfeeding (some babies are more sensitive than others to smell and taste).

Here are some ways to fit in exercising at home when you have a (breastfeeding) infant:

- Lay your baby on the floor and do push-ups over him (this usually results in much giggling on behalf of your baby, especially if you make faces)
- Sit your baby on your belly and do sit-ups/curls.
- Alternatively do the "Flying Baby Curl" While on your back, with your knees bent at the chest, place your baby on your shins and do curls.
- Put your baby in a front carrier or sling and do leg lunges.
- Do leg squats with your baby in a front carrier or sling.
- Holding your baby facing out and at chest level do a modified shoulder press.
- Put your baby in a sling and go for a walk.
- Invest in a jogging stroller and go your running with your baby.
- Put your baby in a car seat or swing and workout on the elliptical or treadmill (the whirring noise may lull him to sleep).

****Realize that some days you'll get a good workout in and other days you simply won't.****

Maintaining your physical fitness and weight standards while breastfeeding doesn't have to be a problem. In fact, breastfeeding mothers who exercise have improved cardiovascular fitness, bone mineral density and body composition. By following proper guidelines and incorporating some dietary changes and moderate exercise you can be sure that you'll pass your PFA with flying colors!