

After childbirth: looking and feeling your best!

Having a baby is a wonderful experience, despite the lost sleep, the mess, and the never-ending chores. But it can be hard to fit in self-care. We grab quick meals, exercise flies out the window, our clothes don't fit, and our to-do lists are three feet long. How do we get back in control of our bodies and our lives after childbirth?

Stubborn weight gain is one of the common complaints voiced by new mothers. Nursing mothers especially wonder how they can lose baby weight and still produce enough nutrient-rich breast milk. Some moms suffer from lethargy and uncontrollable mood swings, making it hard to give quality nurturing to their children. This article will give all mothers, regardless of whether they are nursing or not, the tools to lose weight and feel good again.

Not only weight, but also moods, energy levels, and mental acuity are affected by food and exercise. This is true for everyone; the suggestions I make here are for adults and children alike. Neglecting to work out and eating too many refined carbohydrates and too many chemical-laden processed foods can cause depression, irritability, hyperactivity, and brain fog, and cause energy levels and moods to fluctuate wildly. Exercise and good nutrition can boost energy and wellness so moms and their families can both flourish.

Those of you who are breast feeding may already know that nursing uses up about 500 calories a day. While you don't need to eat *more* food to produce enough breast milk for your baby to thrive, you do need to eat *nutrient-rich* foods to ensure adequate nutrition. It's normal, and a good thing, to carry about five extra pounds while you are nursing. If that is all the extra weight you are carrying, put off losing it until your baby is weaned. If you are carrying more than that amount, or if your baby is close to being weaned or if you are not nursing, then follow the recommendations in this article to help you reach your target weight.

Regardless of how much extra weight you are carrying right now, let me encourage you to be patient with your body and to avoid extreme cleanses or skipping meals. This is especially important if you are nursing. Focus instead on eating nutritious foods instead of empty calories. It helps nursing mothers to make good food choices if they remember that everything they eat is passed to their babies.

I recommend adopting a low-glycemic lifestyle, which allows gradual and permanent weight loss while at the same time providing very high levels of nutrition. Low-glycemic foods are simply foods that are low in carbohydrates, mainly vegetables and lean meat, poultry, and fish. Carbohydrates affect our blood sugar levels, and too many carbohydrates cause those levels to rise rapidly. The result? Insulin is released, those carbs are stored as fat around the belly, blood sugar levels drop, and we're hungry again. These swings affect energy levels, emotions, and the ability to think clearly. Low-glycemic foods don't spike blood sugar, so it remains constant and moods and energy levels stabilize. Eating low-glycemic meals allows your body to release stored fat so excess weight is dropped without "dieting" and feeling hungry and deprived.

We need carbohydrates, of course. The problem is, we eat far too many highly-refined carbohydrates. The worst culprits are baked goods, sweets, fast food, and highly processed food, all of which are tempting to moms because they are fast and easy and make you feel good in the short term. Simply avoiding these types of foods when you are at the grocery store will take you and your family a long way toward your nutritional and weight-management goals.

Try the following tips to shift your eating habits:

- Increase the nutritional value of meals by choosing fresh over processed food, frozen over canned, and organic over conventionally-raised. Select lean meat and poultry that are either organic or raised without the use of antibiotics and hormones.

- Cook at home rather than eating out. Restaurant meals, even those that look healthful, are often loaded with hidden fat, additives, and preservatives.
- At dinner time, serve sensible portions on a 10-inch plate (smaller for young children), with one-half vegetables, one-quarter lean protein, and one-quarter complex carbohydrates (brown rice or quinoa) or starchy vegetables such as sweet potatoes.
- Drink lots of fluids, especially filtered water without ice and fresh vegetable juices (only homemade juice; commercial brands have too much fruit in them). Treat fruit and fruit juices as dessert, even for the kids.
- Choose healthful fats, such as olive oil and coconut oil, over canola oil or vegetable shortening.
- Plan and prep dinners for the work week on Sunday.
- Visit my website to learn more about the low-glycemic lifestyle.

Finally, let's talk exercise. Exercise is a must! It will tone your body, jump start your energy level and keep it vibrant, and give you that healthy glow that is the foundation of all beauty. Like "diet," "exercise" can have all sorts of negative connotations for me, so I use the word "energize." After all, that's what I'm after!

The only rule for energizing is to keep it simple. If you are like most of us, you have neither the time nor the money for a gym membership. Now that research has shown that 30 to 40 minutes of exercise every day is much better for you than 90 minutes of exercise three times a week, you can feel good about creating little windows of opportunity to energize your body.

Pick out a DVD, such as Jillian Michaels' *Thirty-Day Shred*, (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Pc-NizMgg8>) and liven up your morning while the baby naps or the children have breakfast. I put on my workout clothes when I get up in the morning. While my son eats breakfast I energize in front of the TV, lifting hand-weights and jumping my heart into action. Once you get into the routine,

you'll look forward to energizing, which will boost your mood and your energy and keep your energy high throughout the day.

Eating low-glycemic foods and energizing daily will revitalize you physically, emotionally, and mentally. You don't have to change all your habits at once. Be gentle with yourself! Pick one of the changes suggested in this article to focus on this week and concentrate just on that. Next week, add one or two more. Before you know it, you'll feel and look like yourself again – only better.

About Donna Parker

Donna Parker LAc. is a Classical Five Element acupuncturist and WellCoach who supports patients in making healthy lifestyle changes. Donna understands the frustration of stubborn baby weight gain and the process of changing deeply ingrained eating and lifestyle habits, having changed to a low-glycemic lifestyle to lose her own baby weight.

She offers personal lifestyle coaching and customized health recommendations reflecting lifestyle, age, body type, health issues, and weight loss goals. Donna helps moms working toward a healthier lifestyle to transition from high-carbohydrate foods to low-glycemic foods, a change that results in permanent weight loss and increased vitality. Visit Donna's website at www.bestwaytolosebabyweight.com for more information about her 28-day program.