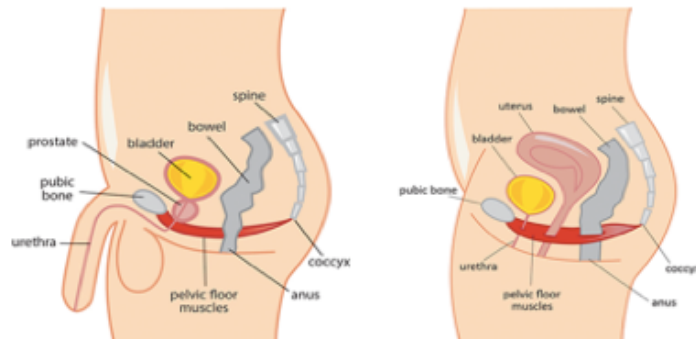


# How to Return to Running After Childbirth

*The Role of Pelvic Floor  
Physiotherapy*



# What is the Pelvic Floor, and Why Does it Matter for Running After Childbirth?



The pelvic floor is a group of muscles that sits nicely right in the bottom of your pelvis. It has several functions including:

- Providing support for your pelvic organs
- Providing stability for your low back, hips, and pubic bones
- Preventing urinary and fecal leakage
- Contributing to erection and allows for penetration during intercourse
- Helping to prevent pelvic congestion

**BUT... most importantly, over the last 9+ months your pelvic floor had to support your growing baby and allow it to pass through the birth canal! This doesn't occur without stress on these tissues and rarely without injury.**

## SO WHY CAN RUNNING MAKE THINGS WORSE?

There are several factors to consider before returning to running after childbirth. If a mother doesn't rehab her pelvic floor muscles properly before returning to running, it can lead to dysfunction.

When you run, there is a sudden rise in pressure in your abdomen which pushes down on the pelvic organs and pelvic floor. Your body takes on anywhere from 1.6-2.5x bodyweight with each step you take. Imagine how much pressure there is on your pelvic floor!

We are all familiar with the idea that proper recovery and rehabilitation of an injury is paramount before returning to physical activity. So why should it be any different after injury to your pelvic floor?



# How to Return to Running Postpartum With Pelvic Floor Physio

Clearly, returning to running after childbirth isn't as simple as getting a "go ahead" from a health care professional. There are several things to consider before hitting the ground running!

## *5 Steps to Returning to Running After Childbirth*

- Schedule an assessment with a pelvic health physiotherapist
- Learn about symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunction
- Begin a low impact exercise regime to build running specific strength
- Successfully complete load management and strength assessment without symptoms
- Work with your physiotherapist to create a gradual return to running program



## **STEP 1: Schedule your Assessment**

In the newest return to running guidelines for postpartum women, it is recommended that ALL women, **regardless of how they deliver**, should have a pelvic floor examination by a trained pelvic health physiotherapist. This exam will assess:

- Pelvic floor muscle strength
- Pelvic floor muscle endurance
- Coordination of pelvic floor and abdominal muscles
- Pelvic organ prolapse

## STEP 2: Signs of Pelvic Floor Dysfunction

The following are a list of symptoms that indicate you may be having pelvic floor dysfunction:

- Urinary or fecal leakage
- Difficulties emptying your bowels
- Heaviness/pressure/dragging in the pelvic area
- Gap in the middle of your abdomen (sign of *Diastasis Rectus Abdominis*)
- Decreased abdominal strength
- Low back or pelvic pain
- Pain with intercourse

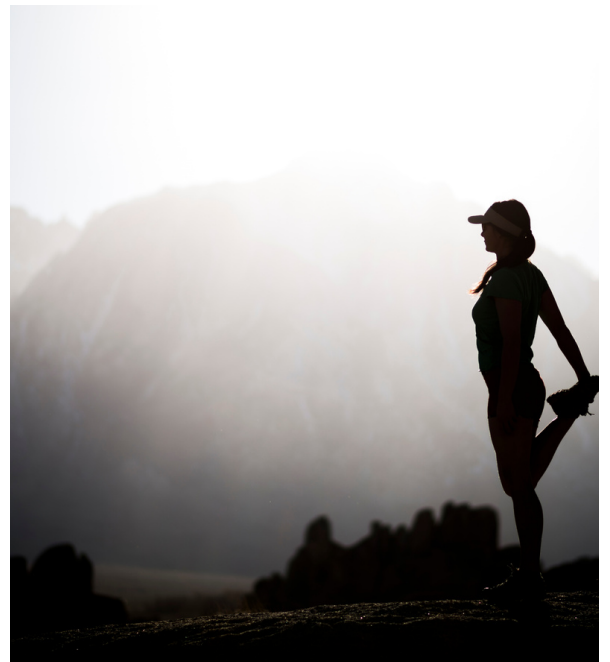
If you are experiencing any of these symptoms before, during, or after a run, that is a sign that you may need to see a pelvic floor physiotherapist.



## STEP 3: LOW IMPACT STRENGTH PROGRAM

- **Week 0-2:** Pelvic floor muscle exercises, basic core exercises and walking
- **Week 2-4:** Consider adding in some functional movements *without weight*
- **Week 4-6:** Low impact cardiovascular training
- **Week 6-8:** Increase duration and intensity of low impact exercises, start to do some resistance exercises for the core and lower limbs

**Week 8-12:** Progress intensity and duration of cardio exercises



*The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology recommends that strength conditioning exercises be performed before, during, and after pregnancy.*



## STEP 4:

# Pass Load Management and Strength Tests

Ok, so you're feeling good. Can you start running now?

**ANSWER:** Maybe. Once you have done the early work, there is a physical test that can be done by your physiotherapist to help determine whether you are ready to return.

### This includes...

#### Load Management Tests

- Walking tolerance
- Single leg tolerance
- Jumping/bounding
- Balance tests

#### Strength Tests

- Calf strength
- Glute strength
- Quad and hamstring strength
- Hip strength

## STEP 5: Build a Return to Running Program

If you've made it this far, good on you! It isn't easy to do the prep work before hitting the roads after childbirth. Now you need to generate a program to build up your distance and intensity **gradually!**

To do this, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Start small, even 1-2 minutes of running can be a lot!
- The recommendations suggest beginning with a run/walk progression that gradually builds over time.
- Build training volume (distance/time) **BEFORE** intensity.
- Set short-term and long-term goals. This gives you something to strive for immediately while giving you something to work on in the future.

***Always monitor for signs and symptoms and adjust accordingly. This is where a physiotherapist can assist!***

