

Nutrition Matters

Healthy Measures After Pregnancy: Be Active, Eat Well, and Be Yourself!

Congratulations on your new baby! Finding time and energy to care for yourself while caring for your new baby may be a challenge. However, you can start by taking steps to **Be Active, Eat Well and Be Yourself**. Following these healthy measures will help you feel good and stay energized.

Healthy Measures Your Way... Every Day

Be Active

Think of all the benefits. Being active will give you more energy to take care of yourself and your baby. Being active each day will help you sleep better, reduce stress and achieve or maintain a healthy weight.

Start small. Start with 10 minutes each day of any activity you enjoy and gradually increase to 30 minutes. Be active everyday or at least 3 times per week...just keep moving!

Keep it simple. Start the day with simple stretches to rejuvenate. Take your baby for a walk every day and enjoy the fresh air (even if getting baby ready to go seems like a workout in and of itself!). If the weather isn't great, turn on some music and dance or play with your baby at home.

Make it a family affair. Being active has health benefits and provides opportunities for you to spend time with family and friends. Enjoy the outdoors by walking with your family at a local park. Join programs offered at community centres in your area, for example, "Mom and Baby" groups. Have fun exploring your neighborhood.

Eat Well

Food nourishes your body and keeps you healthy. Eating well after giving birth and during breastfeeding is essential to replenish nutrient stores in your body. In

fact, during breastfeeding, you can expect your appetite and thirst to increase. This is your body's way of getting the extra energy needed daily to produce breast milk.

Eat well-balanced meals and snacks based on Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. Foods from all four food groups (Grain Products, Vegetables and Fruit, Milk Products and Meat and Alternatives) are important to provide energy for your busy day and replenish your body's nutrient stores after pregnancy.

Variety adds enjoyment. Choose a variety of foods every day. Avoid falling into the trap of thinking that foods can be "good" or "bad". Eat all the foods that you enjoy and aim for a healthy balance and size-wise portions.

Listen for Hunger Cues. Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full. Listen to your body: are you really hungry? Or do you need other nourishment such as sleep, fresh air, cool water or just a change of pace.



Be Yourself

Celebrate yourself as a mom. Recognize that giving birth and caring for a new baby are great achievements. Remind yourself of all your skills, accomplishments, relationships, interests, and celebrate them.

Make time for yourself. As a mom, you need to find a balance between home, work, family and friends. Every day set aside time to care for yourself even if it's only 15 minutes.

Focus on the best possible you. Don't compare yourself to others. Being yourself starts with accepting who you are and focusing on your strengths and abilities. Recognize that a baby brings many changes to your life and you are doing your best.

What about changes in your body after pregnancy?

Giving birth can bring changes not only to your lifestyle, but also to your body weight and shape. If you are feeling discouraged because your body is not the same as before pregnancy, keep in mind that:

- Changes in body shape and weight are necessary to support a healthy pregnancy.
- During breastfeeding, the extra fat stores will be used to produce breast milk.
- Body changes after pregnancy are unique for each woman. How much or how fast your body will change depends on your genetic make-up and your lifestyle.

Beware of dieting. Some women become concerned with losing weight after pregnancy and decide to follow restrictive “fad” diets or extreme exercise programs. Dieting and exercise programs that promise a “quick-fix” solution do not work. In the long run, this approach may be harmful to your health and lead to weight gain.

Healthy Measures is a new approach that focuses on overall health and promotes physical activity, eating well and building self-esteem. Adopting this non-dieting, health-centered approach may take time and patience, however, a healthier and happier you is definitely worth the effort!

Do you need to make a shift to Healthy Measures? Do you let calorie counts and a number on the scale determine how you feel? Are you so concerned with the way you look that you forget to recognize qualities and accomplishments in yourself?



Listen to what your body is telling you:
When you are hungry, you need nourishment.
When you are sad, you need understanding.
When your body needs activity or rest, you need to listen to your inner voice.

It is time to find new ways of measuring your health, without focusing on weight loss and dieting. The following chart can help you shift to Healthy Measures:

Weight and Diet focused	Make a shift to	Healthy Measures
You diet, skip meals, and restrict certain foods.	↪	Improve your eating habits. Eat at least 3 meals (including breakfast) and snacks.
You let a restrictive diet control what you eat.	↪	Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full. Pay attention to know when to say “enough”.
You exercise only to burn fat. You exercise excessively.	↪	Enjoy being active your way everyday (walking, playing with your baby, gardening, using stairs etc.)
Dieting and excessive exercise keep you feeling fatigued and low in energy.	↪	Being active and eating well make you feel energized and healthy. Your body’s nutrient stores are replenished.
You strive for an “ideal body” that is not realistic for you.	↪	Recognize that healthy bodies come in various shapes and sizes.
You bring yourself down based on the way you look.	↪	Celebrate your baby, your body and mind. Value and appreciate yourself.

More Information

Staying Off the Diet Roller Coaster, L Omichinski, HUGS International 2000

Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family, E. Satter, Kelcy Press, E Satter and Associates 1999

The Ultimate Healthy Eating Plan, L. Pearson RD and M. Smith H Ec, Whitecap Books 2002

Healthy Measures: www.healthymeasures.ca

Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity: www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion

For more information or for copies of *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating* and *Canada’s Physical Activity Guide* contact Toronto Public Health.

Nutrition Matters is produced by Toronto Public Health. For more information call 416-338-7600. For additional issues of Nutrition Matters newsletters, refer to Publications on our Web site at www.toronto.ca/health.