



FIT Mum



What to do to get back in shape and stay in shape when you have young children? **TIFFANY GASTON** writes from first hand experience.

Becoming a mother is a life changing experience in many ways. For one thing, your body is no longer your body. It has been inhabited by another human, which is miraculous and beautiful, but can be equally scary. For some, the struggle of losing our former self in our new identity of "mummy" can be a major life adjustment.

Often times, women have difficulty finding the balance necessary to take care of their children while maintaining their own needs.

Challenging as this may be, I found this valuable to master for the benefit of my own sanity. The other reality is that everything you once knew about your body has

changed. The good news is, you can get it back!

Young children are a lot of responsibility. Mothers work the equivalent of a full time job along with over-time, nights, weekends and we are "on-call" around the clock. If you don't give yourself enough credit, chew on that for a minute. It is said that we have the toughest job of all and I know there have been plenty of days I would have rather gone to work!

Children's needs often replace our own, but it really doesn't have to be this way in order for you to be a good mom. One thing I realized early on, is that if I want to be the best mum possible to my children, I must not push my own needs aside. Remaining active and healthy has always been important aspects of my life. Incorporating young children into this equation can at times be challenging, but not impossible if you are motivated to do so.

For me, nursing was a major

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component in losing much of the weight I gained during pregnancy. I nursed for as long as possible with each child, which allowed me to lose my pregnancy weight quickly. The simple act of your body producing milk can burn hundreds of calories a day just to keep up with the demands of your baby. Those demands were especially high with my son who was born weighing in at 10 pounds 11oz. My body worked overtime with him!

As my doctor allowed, I resumed my exercise and made healthy choices with my meals. I found that I only needed 15 to 30 minutes a day to get the exercise I needed. When I did not make this time, I found I was more easily frustrated, upset or irritable. Let's face it – no one wants to deal with a cranky, fussy baby or a mother that behaves the same way!

PRIORITIZE

Learn to be a morning person if you are not. Set your alarm early and grab a quick

workout first thing in the morning. This is my favorite time of day because there's really no "mummy guilt" about making time for you if everyone is still asleep. I've found I can get more accomplished by 7:00am than most do all day. When your workout is done and out of the way, you will be better equipped to handle what life throws at you. If you put it off until later, there are so many things that can happen throughout the day, that you can potentially use as an excuse not to exercise, so make it happen!

Other options to squeeze in a workout include using a treadmill while baby naps or plays nearby, take advantage of the kids club at your local gym or take the jogging stroller for a spin outdoors with baby. Sign up for a Mummy Boot Camp at the park. Your kids will learn by your example that fitness is fun and can be

done anywhere.

Never sell yourself short. Yes, the laundry, dishes and housework are all important, but so is your health and mental attitude. Never put yourself last on the list or the rest will certainly not get done. A low self-esteem leads to feelings of depression and low energy. Making sure to make time for you in the mix of all your chores is just as important, if not more so, in being a happy mum. You will



« High knees thrusting is an exercise you can do at home.





accomplish more simply by having better time management skills.

EAT WELL

If 80 per cent of your diet comprises how you look, it would make sense that by keeping your food intake on point, the majority of the time you have a better chance of losing weight or maintaining where you're at more so than exercise alone. Sure exercise is important, but without the nutrition element, you are climbing an uphill battle.

Prepare healthy food choices in advance for easy grab-and-go options, leaving no excuse not to eat well and consistently throughout the day. Eating every three hours helps speed up your metabolism and keeps blood sugar levels even. This helps to avoid a binge that can follow an extended period of not eating when we tend to reach for the worst possible options.

Avoid packaged and processed foods and opt for fresh, healthy, whole foods to feed and nurture your body. If you want the best for your kids, why wouldn't you want the best for yourself?

REST WELL

Sleep is a major component of good health and weight loss, which can often be overlooked. For adults that's about seven to eight hours nightly and even more if you have a "sleep debt" meaning previous nights of inadequate sleep. Now I realize a newborn will not allow you to sleep through the night, but taking advantage of getting a nap when baby does can really help you out. I recall trying to get all of my laundry and housekeeping done while my kids slept. Learning that you don't have to be superwoman was an even bigger challenge to accept, but at some point, I figured out that I needed to take advantage of the situation and rest on some days.

ASK FOR HELP

Feeling tired, flustered or just in need of a little alone time? It's ok to ask for help. I have these moments and usually make the executive decision to put myself in time out. If your husband is available to help, have him take the kids so you can meet a friend for coffee, hit the gym alone or take a day of beauty. Acting as a team when it comes to your children, displays the unity of two parents and is a great way for your children to spend some quality time with dad.

If you don't have this option, hire a sitter whom you trust or a family member for an hour or two, so you can run a few errands. There's nothing like a woman on a mission with little time. I guarantee that will be the most productive two hours you have all week!

EXERCISE

Do you have 15 minutes? Though it may seem as if you do not, we can all find 15 minutes somewhere in our day. If you have time to watch your favourite television programme or surf the internet, you can certainly omit that in an effort to fit in a quick workout. According to the Mayo Clinic, exercise not only burns calories, which results in weight loss, but it



▲ A high intensity interval training workout can be done in as little as 15 minutes and will leave you more energized.

also elevates our mood. Certain chemicals in our brains are released through exercise, helping to alleviate stress and enhance our mood. This can lead to overall better self-esteem and self-confidence as well. That terrific benefit as well as the energy you will gain in completing a workout, will help you to keep up with the high-energy needs of your children.

High intensity interval training (HIIT) workout can be done in as little as 15 minutes and will leave you more energized. The best part is that you can do it from home without the need for a gym or any exercise equipment.

● Photos of Tiffany Gaston, by James Patrick. For more health and fitness tips and recipes, visit Tiffany Gaston at www.tiffanyleegaston.com

HIGH INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING

Here is a workout you can do from home with only your bodyweight:
Using an interval timer, set it for two rounds, 45 seconds work / 15 seconds rest.

- Plank jacks (from plank position on elbows, jump your legs in and out).
- High knees (running in place while thrusting your knees as high as possible).
- V ups (from a chair or bench, bring your feet straight up in a V formation).
- Burpees (drop down into a plank, jump your feet forward and jump straight up).
- Squat jumps (squatting as if you are sitting in a chair and jumping up from this position)
- Alternating jumping lunges (lunging in place while switching legs back and forth).
- Push-ups (from feet or knees).
- Sit-ups.

