

Flex to the Fullest



If you're wondering how best to safely maintain your fitness during pregnancy and help your body to recover once your bouncing bub arrives, instructor NICOLE SERJE of **Flex Studio** has some advice.

“ Staying fit and active in pregnancy will help you feel stronger after giving birth and, hopefully, bounce back faster. ”

What exercise classes are safe during pregnancy?

Pilates classes are ideal during pregnancy – you should preferably enrol in a prenatal class to ensure you're getting tailored advice. The second trimester is usually when most active women turn to prenatal classes, but you can join one as soon as you like!

What are the benefits to pregnant mums in continuing to work out?

Exercise generally helps with stress, as it releases endorphins – the “happiness hormones”. Furthermore, exercise can alleviate the stiff back and neck that often accompanies later-term pregnancy. Our prenatal Pilates classes teach mums-to-be how to stabilise their bodies safely and effectively, working on strengthening and releasing tension.

How soon should a new mum resume exercise once her baby arrives?

Staying fit and active in pregnancy will help a woman feel stronger after giving birth and, hopefully, bounce back faster. However, when it comes to pregnancy and birth, it's important to remember that everyone is different, and so you should always get your doctor's okay before going back to any physical activity.

What is diastasis recti, and what important things do we need to know about it?

Increased tension on the abdominal wall in pregnancy may lead to diastasis recti, in which the two large parallel bands of muscle that meet in the middle of the abdomen separate. It doesn't hurt, and you may not even be aware that it exists, but it's important to check, as a separation may lead to increased low back pain, pelvic instability, urinary leakage, or reduced functional strength of the abdominal wall. There are specific exercises that can be prescribed to help mend the separation by strengthening your core and helping to recover those abdominal muscles.

Nicole will be hosting a diastasis repair workshop on 13 September at Flex's Central studio, and one on 20 September at the One Island South location. For more information on this workshop and other pre- and postnatal classes, visit flexhk.com.

Drab to Fab

This Sheung Wan hair salon and spa knows how to look after time-poor mums.

As anyone with young kids knows, carving out a few hours in the salon can feel like more effort than you need to summit Everest. At least, that's what I thought until I visited **Emmanuel F**, an eco-luxe concept that offers hair, spa and makeup services, in one convenient location, tailored to mums and mums-to-be.

Emmanuel F offers luxury treatments for hair and body, using eco-friendly practices – so you can get pampered without concern for your health or your child's. The team also understands the juggle of modern-day mothers. The design of each station is semi-private for the comfort of working and breastfeeding mums. Kids are welcome too; there's even hot chocolate to keep them happy!



My priority was colour – it had been too long between appointments, so my colour had faded and my hair condition was poor. The salon understands that product choice can be a concern for women who are pregnant or nursing, so it's committed to products that are safe and natural; for the past nine years, it's been using Organic Colour System products, which are 90 to 95 percent natural and certified organic.

After my hair was prepped and moisturised and the colour applied, I was whisked off to have some waxing done – the kind of multi-tasking approach that can only be truly appreciated by mums with little time to spare.

The results? My eyebrows look amazing, my hair is shiny and vibrant, and, best of all, the experience was entirely stress-free!

UG/F, The Pemberton, 22-26 Bonham Street, Sheung Wan. 2167 8280 | emmanuel.com

Baby Steps

Pregnancy and childbirth have a huge impact on your body, but there are benefits to getting back into a fitness regime after your little one arrives, as **JULIA LOHMANN**, managing director and master trainer at **HYPOXI**, explains.



How can HYPOXI help women who are pregnant or have recently given birth?

Fat deposits frequently remain in the problem areas after childbirth, and the skin tends to be loose. The innovative HYPOXI-Method is a natural and gentle post-pregnancy exercise solution, helping to strengthen the connective tissue and eliminate fat deposits in problem areas. It uses a combination of alternating pressure

and gentle exercise for stimulating the metabolism and for targeted post-pregnancy body shaping and skin firming, compression therapy to support the lymphatic/vascular system, and vacuum therapy. Alternating application of high and low pressure helps to increase blood flow to the problem areas and transport liquids, toxins and fatty acids away from the region.

Is there a “right time” to start exercising after giving birth?

If you did regular exercise up until the end of your pregnancy, and your birth went smoothly, you can do some light exercise and stretching soon after the birth, but it's always best to get approval from your doctor beforehand.

For more information and a free trial, call 2537 6637 or go to hypoxi.com.hk.



A Safe Pair of Hands

BY KATE FARR

We sit down with doula JEANNE HAUGUEL of **Birth Story** to find out how a little extra support can make all the difference when it comes to your bump, your birth and your bouncing new baby.

Childbirth is one of the most physically and emotionally taxing times of a woman's life, and having strong support in place is key to a positive birth experience. As a doula, Jeanne Hauguel of Birth Story advocates on behalf of the parents-to-be who work with her. "A doula is a professional trained in childbirth, who provides emotional, physical and educational support to a mother who is expecting a baby, is experiencing labour, or has recently given birth."

While they don't provide medical care, doulas are knowledgeable in the medical aspects of labour and birth. "This means they can help parents gain a better understanding of procedures and complications that may arise in late pregnancy or during birth," says Jeanne. "We help parents get prepared for the most memorable day of their life!"

Unlike in other countries, where a midwife-supervised home birth can be an option, most women who give birth in Hong Kong will deliver their baby

in a hospital. This can mean seeing a constant stream of medical professionals, which can be unnerving and distracting for labouring mums. Jeanne explains that additional support can be invaluable. "A doula acts as an advocate for the mother, encouraging her in her desires for her birth; unlike most medical professionals, they are with you throughout the process. They can provide comfort with pain relief techniques such as breathing, massage and optimal labour positions, and also encourage participation from the partner while offering reassurance."

And what about mothers who are deliberating between delivering in a public or private hospital? "In a private hospital, so long as the mother's obstetrician is OK to have a doula in the birthing room, then we can stay throughout labour and birth. In public hospitals, only one accompanying person is allowed in the delivery room and so the partner will go with the woman while I stay available by phone." She adds that parents delivering in a public hospital often hire a doula to support labour at home, "for as long as the mother feels comfortable to do so, or until she is showing signs of active labour. I help them transfer to the hospital when they are ready."

Does Jeanne's support also extend to mothers who are delivering via planned or emergency caesarean section? "Of course! Parents having a C-section need support as much as parents aiming for a natural birth. The goal of a doula is to help parents have a positive

and safe birth experience, whether they chose an un-medicated, medicated or caesarean delivery."

So, when should expectant parents looking for more information and support get in touch with a doula? "Any time, really! Some parents need reassurance from very early in pregnancy. Others feel the need to speak to a doula when they reach the end of the second trimester and start planning antenatal classes. Some will book doulas right at the last minute, although of course it can be difficult to ensure availability!"

And the support doesn't stop once the baby arrives. "After birth, doulas can spend time helping parents to care for their newborn, helping with the breastfeeding process and encouraging bonding between the new baby and family members."

Finally, Jeanne says that the doula's purpose is "to help women have a safe, memorable, and empowering birthing experience." And that sounds like support that all parents-to-be can benefit from.

Learn more at doulabirthstory.com.

Jeanne's 3 top tips for expectant parents in HK

- #1 Choose your doctor and hospital wisely according to your needs and birth wishes.
- #2 Consider hiring a doula for antenatal classes, labour and birth support, and postpartum help, to ensure that your birth experience will be positive, loving and empowering.
- #3 Even if you choose not to work with a doula during the birth, it's worthwhile having their contact details for afterwards. We often need help, even if just for a bit of reassurance, and the postpartum experience is just as important as the birth itself.

Beautiful Bellies

Why a little bit of postnatal pampering is a great option for new mums.

Name: **Evelyn Choi** Children: **2**



From restoring your figure and energy levels to helping ease discomfort after delivery, the benefits of Jamu massage and postpartum abdominal binding have been known for centuries. Mum of two JESSICA TANHUBER started practising these ancient Javanese techniques after she had trouble finding a practitioner here in Hong Kong. **Mummies and Bellies** has since grown to include more therapists. We spoke to one of the company's happy clients for some insights.

mummiesbellies.com

This is my second time with Mummies and Bellies. I tried the 10-day package both times. The service is professional and experienced. I had seen great results when I tried this three years ago, after I delivered my first baby. For my second delivery, I chose Mummies and Bellies without any hesitation, and this time Grace was attending to me. She was very patient and her massage was very good. She gave me tips about how to maintain my body after I finished my 10-day programme. I would definitely recommend this to my friends, because I can see the results and their service is excellent.

One *Fit* Mother!

BY KATE FARR

We chat to ALEX INGLIS, instructor at Central's leading Pilates and Gyrotonic studio **Iso Fit** about smart workouts that work with your growing body during pregnancy, and her top tips for safe and steady postnatal weight-loss.

There is a common perception that working out during pregnancy is risky and that pregnant women should do nothing more strenuous than knitting booties while they wait for the stork. But if 40 weeks as a couch potato isn't for you, then Alex Inglis – a mum herself – has good news. “Pregnant women can continue with whatever fitness style they enjoy; they will just need to modify and reduce the intensity; exactly *when* that needs to happen is dependent on them, but their bodies will quickly tell them what is too much.” She adds, “Listen to your body, as it is solely focused on the growing baby – if it doesn't like something, it'll tell you!”

Iso Fit focuses on two fitness specialities, Pilates and Gyrotonic, both of which are gentle yet effective exercises that are ideal during pregnancy. Alex clarifies that, unless otherwise advised by their doctor, women can continue with Pilates routines after the first trimester – all the way up until birth. And the benefits of Pilates during pregnancy are numerous.

Although Gyrotonic workouts are a little less well known, this discipline also has a number of important benefits to offer pre- and postnatal women. “It's a movement method that creates flexibility and stamina,” says Alex. “The uniqueness of the system is that it stretches and strengthens at the same time, thereby increasing range of motion and developing coordination.” (If pregnancy has seen you



bumping into table legs and stumbling over your feet, the idea of improved coordination will undoubtedly sound very appealing!) “It also provides an opportunity to move in all directions, and it flows through the body to create long, lean limbs and fabulous abs.”

The studio offers both private and semi-private training, but it is the group class environment that sets Iso Fit apart when it comes to catering to pregnant women. “Pre- and postnatal clients are able to attend any of the group classes. The instructors are fully trained to be able to modify any exercises to cater to anyone's requirements,” says Alex, meaning you and bub are in good hands. This is great news for women who want to continue to work out with their existing gym buddy or partner, and a smart way of making expectant clients feel like an integral part of the studio, rather than being forced to find a new workout for just a few months.

One less thing for busy mums-to-be to have to consider? We'll take that!

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