

Post Baby Body Syndrome

Pregnancy leads to changes in a woman's body. In some women, the changes persist long after the post-partum period despite good intentions and effort on their part.

Some women can do 250 sit-ups in the morning, and 250 sit-ups in the evening, and still not have a tight, flat stomach. Although the stomach muscles would be strong, there is often still a pouch. Depending on your own unique situation, many of the changes can be reversed either partially or completely.

What determines if the changes that occur will persist after the post-partum period?

What determines if the changes will persist is the extent to which the skin and tissues have been stretched during the pregnancy. This determines the tissues ability to snap back into their pre-pregnant condition. This is like a "shriveled balloon effect."

Example #1 : If you take a normal balloon and put a little puff of air in it, and then let the air out, it will most likely return to it's normal shape. If you take the same balloon and keep expanding it until it's about ready to pop, then let the air out, the balloon is thinned and shriveled. It isn't the same as it was before it was blown up. A very similar thing happens in pregnancy to the skin of the breasts and abdomen.

Example #2 : A woman that is 5' 2" and 110 pounds who gains 65 pounds with her pregnancy. The stretch that occurred during her pregnancy is significant enough that her body wasn't able to snap back into its pre-pregnancy shape. On the other hand, the same 5'2"/110 lbs. woman who gained 25 pounds, is more likely to have a more normal shape after the pregnancy because her body and skin, were able to retain their elasticity.

What is the definition of Post-Baby Body Syndrome?

Post-Baby Body Syndrome is what we call the changes that occurred in a woman's body after the post-partum period that persist despite exercise, diet, and nutrient treatment, these changes are often permanent. The syndrome itself came to light after the following event occurred in the life of one of my patients.

This patient was scheduled for a Tummy Tuck. I will call her Mary (not her real name) who was 43 years old, normal weight and in great health. She ran several miles three times a week and did yoga twice a week. Since the birth of her two teenage sons she has had a persistent bulge and loose skin in the abdomen. She had wanted to do something about it and finally decided to have surgery. In the process of getting ready for her surgery she went to her Primary Care Physician to get routine blood work done. When her doctor saw her, Mary was told that she needed to loose weight and there would be no value to having Tummy Tuck surgery.

She felt very angry and it became obvious to her that the doctor did not fully understand her situation, and she felt that he was “preaching” to her. It was later that Mary shared with me the story of what had happened and how she felt.

What is obvious to me is that many of my patients who come in, have thoughts of being failures because their efforts to get rid of their pouch were unsuccessful. It was shocking for me to discover that a medical professional was not even aware that there can be persistent body changes in a woman after pregnancy, and sometimes no matter what they do in terms of exercise, diet or therapy, those changes will persist.

What physical changes are a part of Post- Baby- Body Syndrome?

1. Skin that is stretched and loose, and does not have the ability to snap back normally.
2. The fascia (the tissue holding the muscles), particularly the muscles of the abdomen, has been stretched. No amount of exercise or sit-ups will help this skin to return to normal.
3. The pelvic area is often widened, looser and may have a slight pelvic tilt.
4. Breast volume changes. Sometimes the breasts are larger, or there has been shrinking, loss of breast volume and a difference from one side to the other, with the breasts being lopsided as a result.
5. Weight that is added to the hips and the outer thighs, and a widening of the pelvis.
6. Changes in the floor of the pelvis resulting in dysfunction of urination and bladder control.
7. And there are often vaginal changes that occur as well.

In summary, women after pregnancy can generally be divided into two main groups. The first group of women can exercise and diet right and their bodies will return to normal or near normal. The second group of women are those that, despite their efforts in a healthy diet and exercise, the changes to their bodies are permanent, and do not respond to conservative modalities of treatment.

Because all women are different, it takes the recommendations of a board-certified cosmetic surgeon to give you the answers you need to make an informed decision.



Robert J. Kenevan, M.D
President / Medical Director
Avalon Clinic for Cosmetic Surgery