

THE POSTPARTUM EXERCISE COMEBACK

What to avoid, what to rebuild and how to safely work your way back to the exercise you love

**YOU DON'T NEED
TO BOUNCE BACK.
YOU NEED TO
BUILD BACK.**





A NOTE BEFORE YOU START

This guide provides general information about returning to exercise after pregnancy and birth. Every woman's recovery is different, and the information in this ebook is not intended to replace individual medical or health advice.

If you're experiencing pain, pelvic-floor or bladder/bowel symptoms, have concerns about your recovery, or aren't sure whether you're ready to progress your exercise, speak with your doctor, midwife or women's health physiotherapist for personalised advice.

Listen to your body, progress gradually and get the support you need along the way.



Having a baby can change your relationship with exercise.

Maybe you were running regularly before pregnancy and now a 20-minute walk feels like plenty.

Maybe you were lifting weights, doing Pilates, playing sport or smashing HIIT classes – and you're wondering when you'll feel like yourself again.

Or maybe you've never been particularly into exercise, but now you want to rebuild your strength, improve your fitness and feel more confident in your body.

And then there are the symptoms.

Leaking when you run. A feeling of heaviness or pressure. Abdominal doming. Pelvic or lower-back pain. A core that doesn't feel as strong or connected as it used to. Or simply that nagging feeling that you don't really know what you're supposed to be doing.



Here's the good news:

You don't have to give up the things you love.

But you may need to approach them differently for a while.

Pregnancy and childbirth can change how your body responds to load, impact and exercise.

Your recovery will depend on things such as your pregnancy, birth, healing, previous fitness, current strength, symptoms and the demands you're asking of your body.

That means there's no universal date when every woman is ready to jump back into running, heavy lifting or high-intensity workouts.

Australian Government guidance recommends a gradual return to physical activity after birth, with timing varying according to individual circumstances.



And that's exactly what this guide is about.

Not getting your “old body” back.

Not rushing because someone else seems further ahead.

Not avoiding exercise because you're worried you'll make something worse.

Building your capacity so your body can handle what you want to ask it to do.

FIRST: THERE IS NO UNIVERSAL LIST OF “BAD” POSTPARTUM EXERCISES

You’ve probably heard some version of:
“Don’t do crunches after having a baby.”

Or: “You shouldn’t run until X months postpartum.”

Or: “Heavy lifting is bad for your pelvic floor.”

The reality is more nuanced. An exercise isn’t automatically bad because you’ve had a baby.

An exercise that causes symptoms for one woman may be completely appropriate for another.

And an exercise that isn’t right for you today may be perfectly appropriate later.

Instead of asking: “Am I allowed to do this?”

A more useful question is: “Is my body ready for this level of load, impact and intensity right now?”

That’s the mindset we’ll use throughout this guide.



PART 1

BEFORE YOU START YOUR BODY HAS BEEN THROUGH A LOT

Pregnancy and birth involve enormous physical changes. Your abdominal wall stretches. Your pelvic floor carries increased load. Your posture and movement patterns can change. Your strength and cardiovascular fitness may decrease if you've had time away from your usual exercise. You may also be recovering from a vaginal birth, tears or stitches, a caesarean section or other complications. And then there's the small matter of caring for a newborn.

So if your first workout doesn't feel anything like your old workout, that doesn't mean you've failed. It means you're starting from a different place.



FORGET THE “BOUNCE BACK” TIMELINE

There is no prize for getting back to your pre-pregnancy workout as quickly as possible.

Your recovery isn't a race.

The goal isn't to prove that you can do the same workout you did before pregnancy.

The goal is to gradually rebuild the strength, control, fitness and confidence you need for the activities you actually want to do.

That might eventually mean:

- lifting weights;
- running;
- jumping;
- playing sport;
- doing HIIT;
- returning to Pilates;
- hiking;
- swimming;
- chasing toddlers around the park.

Or it might simply mean feeling strong enough to get through your day without everything feeling exhausting.

Your goal gets to be your goal.



PART 2

WHAT DOES YOUR BODY NEED TO REBUILD?

You don't necessarily need to start with a complicated workout. Postpartum recovery is about rebuilding several things at once.

CORE STRENGTH

Your core isn't just your abs. It works with your diaphragm, pelvic floor, abdominal muscles, back and other muscles around your trunk to help you control movement and manage load. After pregnancy, you may feel like your core isn't working the way it used to. That's something you can progressively rebuild.

PELVIC FLOOR FUNCTION

The pelvic floor isn't simply about doing endless squeezes. It needs to contract, relax and coordinate with movement and changes in pressure. Your pelvic floor also needs to cope with the demands you place on it. Walking is one demand. Lifting is another. Running and jumping are considerably different demands. The goal isn't to avoid those activities forever. It's to progressively build the capacity to do them.

GENERAL STRENGTH

Pregnancy and the early months with a baby can mean a lot of time away from structured exercise. You may have lost some strength — or simply feel less confident using it.

Squatting, pushing, pulling, carrying, lifting and moving through different ranges of motion are all things you can gradually rebuild.

FITNESS

You don't need to go from "not exercising" to smashing a 45-minute HIIT session.

Start where your fitness is now. Then build.

Walking can become brisk walking.

Brisk walking can become longer walks.

Strength sessions can gradually become more challenging.

And eventually, if running is your goal, you can work towards impact and running capacity.



CONFIDENCE

This one is easy to overlook. After months of pregnancy and birth, it's normal to question what your body can do. Part of returning to exercise is learning: "I can trust my body again."

PART 3

THE EXERCISES THAT MAY NEED MODIFYING

Here's where things get interesting. We're not creating a list of exercises you're banned from doing. We're looking at exercises that may need modifying depending on your symptoms, recovery and current capacity.

1.

CRUNCHES, SIT-UPS AND CHALLENGING CORE EXERCISES

If you've noticed abdominal doming, bulging or a ridge appearing through the middle of your abdomen during certain movements, you may need to modify the exercise and work on your ability to manage pressure and control movement.



That doesn't mean
your abs are broken.

And it doesn't mean you'll
never do a sit-up again.

Instead, you might temporarily
focus on exercises that allow
you to build better control
before gradually increasing the
challenge.

Think: control → coordination →
strength → load rather than: avoid
abs forever.

2.

RUNNING, JUMPING AND HIGH-IMPACT EXERCISE

Running and jumping place considerably
more demand on your body than walking.

If you're experiencing leaking, pelvic heaviness,
pressure or discomfort when you run or jump,
that can be a sign that your current capacity
doesn't yet match the demand.

That doesn't mean: "You'll never run again."
It means: "Let's build the capacity to run."

You may need to spend more time working
on strength, control and impact tolerance
before progressing.

And that's where a structured return-to-impact
or return-to-running program can be useful.



3.

HEAVY LIFTING

Lifting your baby is lifting. So is carrying the pram. So is picking up a toddler who has suddenly decided the floor is lava.

Strength training isn't something you need to fear after having a baby. But if you're returning to heavier lifting, you may need to rebuild your tolerance gradually.

Pay attention to symptoms such as:

- pelvic heaviness or pressure;
- leaking;
- pain;
- a feeling of bulging;
- difficulty controlling your breathing or movement;
- symptoms that become noticeably worse after training.

The answer isn't necessarily to stop lifting. It may be to adjust the load, reps, range of movement, technique or exercise and gradually build back up.



4. HIGH-INTENSITY HIIT

HIIT can be fantastic exercise. But jumping straight back into burpees, box jumps, skipping and repeated high-intensity movements after months away from training can be a big jump in demand. If your body isn't ready for that workload yet, symptoms can appear.

Instead, rebuild your strength and fitness first. You can still work hard. Just make sure the intensity matches your current capacity.

5. EXERCISES THAT CAUSE PELVIC OR LOWER-BACK PAIN

Pain isn't something you need to "push" through" to prove you're getting stronger. If an exercise repeatedly causes pain, change something. You might modify: the range of movement; the load; the number of repetitions; the exercise itself; your training volume.

Persistent or significant pain deserves assessment rather than simply trying to train around it.



PART 4

WHAT IF YOU HAVE POSTPARTUM SYMPTOMS?

You don't need to have symptoms to use this guide. But if you do, they are worth paying attention to.

BLADDER LEAKAGE

Leaking when coughing, sneezing, running, jumping or exercising is common around pregnancy and childbirth — but “common” doesn't mean you have to simply put up with it.

If exercise consistently causes leakage, it may be worth having your pelvic floor and movement assessed.

The goal isn't necessarily to eliminate exercise. It's to work out what your body needs to tolerate that activity again.

PELVIC HEAVINESS OR PRESSURE

A feeling of heaviness, dragging, pressure or bulging — particularly if it appears or worsens with activity — is another reason to get individual advice.

You may need to temporarily modify the load or impact you're doing while you rebuild capacity.



DIASTASIS OR ABDOMINAL DOMING

Abdominal separation is common during and after pregnancy. If certain exercises consistently produce noticeable doming or bulging, that can be useful information.

Rather than banning an entire category of exercise, work on control and progressively increase the challenge.

PELVIC PAIN

Not every pelvic-floor problem is about weakness. Some women experience difficulty relaxing the pelvic floor or have pain that is aggravated by certain activities.

If exercise repeatedly causes pelvic pain, don't assume you simply need to "strengthen" your pelvic floor more.

Get assessed.



AFTER A CAESAREAN

A caesarean is major abdominal surgery, so recovery deserves patience.

Your return to exercise should take your healing, symptoms and individual circumstances into account.

Walking and gentle movement can form part of your early return, followed by progressively rebuilding strength and load.

Your six-week check isn't a magical switch that means your body is suddenly ready for everything you did before pregnancy.

Think: build back — don't bounce back.



PART 5

YOUR POSTPARTUM EXERCISE ROADMAP

Think of your return to exercise as a series of stages rather than a deadline.

1. RECOVER

In the early stages, the priority is healing and everyday movement. This might include:

- short walks;
- gentle movement;
- breathing;
- pelvic-floor awareness;
- normal daily activities;
- rest and recovery.

2. RECONNECT

Start reconnecting with how your body moves. This may include:

- breathing and pressure management;
- core control;
- pelvic-floor coordination;
- gentle strength work;
- mobility;
- basic movement patterns.

3.

REBUILD

Now you're building actual strength. You might gradually introduce:

- squats;
- bridges;
- rows;
- presses;
- lunges;
- calf raises;
- carries;
- core exercises;
- progressively heavier resistance.

4.

ADD LOAD

Once your body is tolerating basic strength work, you can gradually increase the challenge.

That could mean:

- heavier weights;
- more repetitions;
- more resistance;
- greater range of movement;
- single-leg exercises;
- more challenging core exercises;
- increased training volume.

The important word is gradually.

5.

ADD IMPACT

If running, jumping or sport is your goal, impact needs to be trained too. You might progress through activities such as:

- walking → brisk walking →
- strength → single-leg control →
- hopping → jogging → running.

The exact pathway will depend on the individual.



6. RETURN TO WHAT YOU LOVE

Eventually, the goal is to return to the activities that matter to you.

Maybe that's running.

Maybe it's lifting heavy.

Maybe it's CrossFit.

Maybe it's netball.

Maybe it's hiking.

Maybe it's simply being able to carry your toddler, groceries and three bags of shopping without feeling like you've done a full-body workout.

The goal isn't to return to your old body. It's to build a body that can handle the life you want to live now.



PART 6

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'RE READY TO PROGRESS?

There's no single checklist that can tell every woman she's ready. But these are useful things to consider.

CAN YOU:

- ☐ complete your current exercises comfortably?
- ☐ breathe normally rather than constantly holding your breath?
- ☐ control the movement you're doing?
- ☐ gradually increase your training without symptoms appearing?
- ☐ recover reasonably well between sessions?
- ☐ perform everyday lifting and carrying comfortably?

continue



CAN YOU

- ☐ increase strength without pelvic pressure or heaviness?
- ☐ exercise without urinary or bowel leakage?
- ☐ exercise without significant pelvic or abdominal pain?
- ☐ increase impact without symptoms worsening?
- ☐ **And importantly:**
How do you feel afterwards?

Sometimes the biggest clue isn't what happens **during** a workout. It's what happens later that day or the next day.

If your symptoms consistently increase after a particular activity, that's useful information. It may mean you need to reduce the dose, modify the movement or build more capacity before progressing.



THE BIG TAKEAWAY

THE EXERCISE ISN'T NECESSARILY THE PROBLEM. THE DOSE MIGHT BE.

You might be able to run. You might be able to jump. You might be able to lift heavy. You might be able to do burpees. You might be able to do crunches. But your body may need time to build the capacity to handle those things again.

Instead of asking: “What exercises am I not allowed to do?”

Try asking: “What does my body need to be able to do this comfortably?”

That small change in mindset can make returning to exercise feel much less frightening.

You're not starting from zero. You're rebuilding.

WHEN TO GET HELP

If you're experiencing persistent or concerning symptoms, it's worth speaking with an appropriate health professional rather than trying to work it out alone.

Consider getting assessed if you're experiencing:

- ongoing pelvic or lower-back pain;
- urinary or bowel leakage;
- pelvic heaviness, pressure or bulging;
- significant abdominal symptoms;
- pain around a scar or healing tissue;
- symptoms that consistently worsen with exercise;
- uncertainty about how or when to progress;
- a lack of confidence about returning to running, lifting or higher-impact exercise.

A women's health physiotherapist can assess your individual situation and help you work out what to modify, what to strengthen and how to progress.



READY TO REBUILD?

Your body doesn't need to "bounce back."
It needs the right support.

Whether you're newly postpartum, starting exercise again after months away, rebuilding your strength or dreaming about getting back to running, you don't have to figure out the next step on your own.

EMLI'S POSTPARTUM PROGRAMS



FOUNDATIONS OF POSTPARTUM RECOVERY

Build your foundations, reconnect with your core and pelvic floor, and start rebuilding strength and confidence.

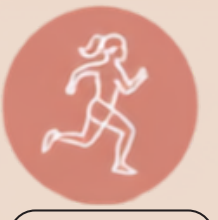
CLICK HERE 



RETURN TO IMPACT

Progress towards jumping and higher-impact movement by building the strength, control and capacity you need.

CLICK HERE 



RETURN TO RUNNING

Follow a structured, symptom-guided pathway towards running.

CLICK HERE 

EMLI's current postpartum pathway is designed around these three stages: Foundations, Return to Impact and Return to Running.



START WHERE YOU ARE. BUILD FROM THERE.

You don't have to rush.

You don't have to compare
your recovery to anyone else's.

And you don't have to give
up the exercise you love.

You just need to work out
what your body needs next.

EXPLORE EML'S POSTPARTUM PROGRAMS

TAP HERE

Your postpartum
journey is yours.

There is no deadline.

Just the next step.





MEET EMLI HEALTH

EXPERT GUIDANCE FOR YOUR BODY. DESIGNED FOR REAL LIFE.

Returning to exercise after having a baby shouldn't mean piecing together advice from social media, guessing which exercises are right for you, or waiting until something goes wrong before getting help.

EMLI Health was created to make expert, evidence-based guidance more accessible to women through fertility, pregnancy and postpartum.

EMLI brings together women's health professionals and practical exercise programs to help you understand your body, build strength and progress towards the activities you want to do.





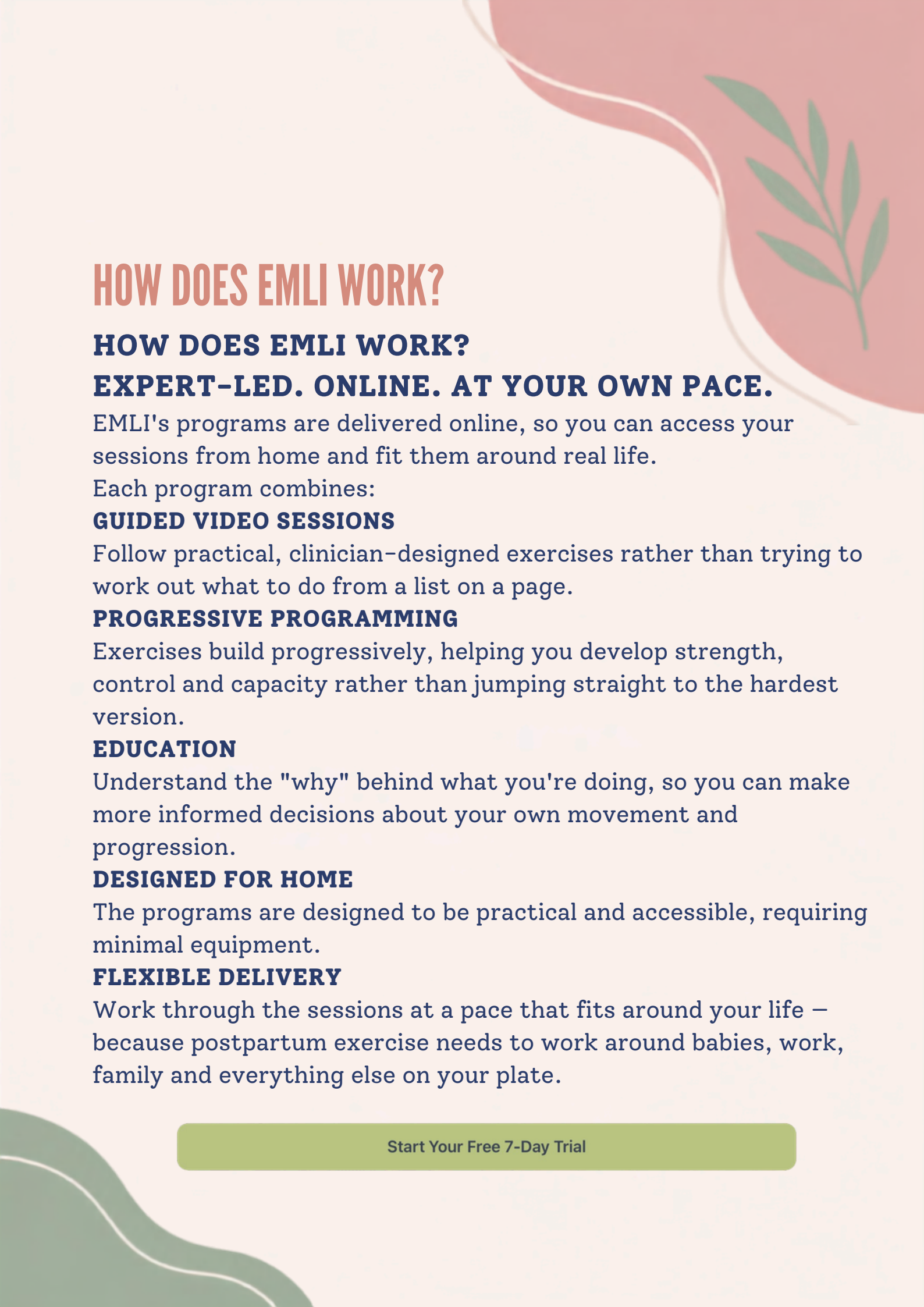
WHO'S BEHIND EMLI?

EMLI was created by Amy and Ali, bringing together lived experience and women's health physiotherapy expertise.

Amy experienced first-hand how difficult it could be to find clear, trustworthy guidance through fertility, pregnancy and postpartum recovery.

Ali is a women's health physiotherapist who has seen the same problem from the other side of the clinic – women unsure about what they should be doing, worried about making symptoms worse, or simply unsure how to progress.

Together, they created EMLI to bridge that gap. Expert guidance shouldn't be difficult to access – and it shouldn't require you to fit your life around endless appointments.



HOW DOES EMLI WORK?

HOW DOES EMLI WORK?

EXPERT-LED. ONLINE. AT YOUR OWN PACE.

EMLI's programs are delivered online, so you can access your sessions from home and fit them around real life.

Each program combines:

GUIDED VIDEO SESSIONS

Follow practical, clinician-designed exercises rather than trying to work out what to do from a list on a page.

PROGRESSIVE PROGRAMMING

Exercises build progressively, helping you develop strength, control and capacity rather than jumping straight to the hardest version.

EDUCATION

Understand the "why" behind what you're doing, so you can make more informed decisions about your own movement and progression.

DESIGNED FOR HOME

The programs are designed to be practical and accessible, requiring minimal equipment.

FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

Work through the sessions at a pace that fits around your life – because postpartum exercise needs to work around babies, work, family and everything else on your plate.

[Start Your Free 7-Day Trial](#)