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Kidspot Editor | March 13, 2016

It seems every time you pick up a magazine there's a cover story about yet another celebrity flaunting their toned body in a bikini only six weeks after giving birth. But don't fall for the celebrity body myth, writes Dilvin Yasa. Instead, be healthy and love your body.



*This post first appeared in The Saturday Daily Telegraph ([http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=sem&utm\\_campaign=acq\\_brand&sourceCode=DTWEB\\_SEM187\\_a&gclid=CO\\_rma3Qu8sCFQWWvQodDnIBUw](http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=sem&utm_campaign=acq_brand&sourceCode=DTWEB_SEM187_a&gclid=CO_rma3Qu8sCFQWWvQodDnIBUw)) and is reproduced here with permission.*

Walk past a newsagent or supermarket shelf and you will see rows of magazines with a new celebrity mum on the cover declaring “How I got my body back!”

The spreads themselves are formulaic. The mum, often photographed in second-skin activewear that doesn't betray a hint of lunch let alone the fact that she gave birth only four weeks ago, will talk about how “the weight just fell off” even though she can't stop herself from eating whole wheels of cheese in front of the TV. She'll finish off by saying how “exercise isn't a priority but my baby is”.

Not into magazines? Perhaps you could watch the televised 2012 Victoria's Secret Fashion Show, in which three of the label's most famous models — Alessandra Ambrosio, Lily Aldridge and Adriana Lima — rocked their six-packs along the runway just weeks after giving birth to their babies.



Failing that, there's always social media where an impressive "post-baby body reveal" shot can earn the celeb over a million likes, as was the case with Kim Kardashian (<http://www.kidspot.com.au/baby/real-life/in-the-news/kim-kardashian-shares-amazing-nude-selfie>) recently. Yet while it's true every pregnancy — and consequently, every post-pregnancy body — is different, the effect these slick, quick celebrity slim-downs can have on everyday mums can be disastrous.

### Pressure to perform

In 2009, a study was conducted on 7000 women with newborns to two-year-olds and found 65 per cent of new mums expected to slim back down to their pre-pregnancy weight by their child's first birthday.

However, when they were polled, mums with slightly older children (aged 12 months to two years), it was discovered more than half the mums were still carrying extra weight, while a whopping 87 per cent of respondents were despondent that their stomachs still had not returned to “normal”. The study is a sign of our times, says body image expert, Flinders University professor Marika Tiggemann. “It wasn’t so long ago women used to be able to get off the body image treadmill when they had a baby, but there’s so much publicity and media commentary on celebrity mothers now that these expectations get normalised, internalised and then reinforced by friends and other mothers,” she says.

“Eventually, what we see out there we start to expect of our own reality, and if we feel we can’t achieve (to look) our best, we feel like failures.”

### The reality of the celebrity slim-down

Before you get a handle of what’s happening with your own post-pregnancy body, it’s important to open your eyes to the smoke and mirrors of the celebrity post-baby (<http://www.kidspot.com.au/MySpot-celebrity-How-10-celebrity-mums-lost-weight-after-having-a-baby+3052+175+article.htm>) “reveal”, says Tracey Anderson, personal trainer to the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Lopez and — at one time — Madonna.

“Everyone’s desperately wanting to look like these women, but you need to remember that all of these images you’re seeing in magazines are airbrushed and manipulated within an inch of their lives,” Anderson says.

**“Trust me — I see these women every day and none of what you see is real.”**

What is different between them and the average mum (<http://www.kidspot.com.au/birth/galleries/pregnancy-galleries/this-is-what-most-women-look-like-after-having-a-baby-hilaria-baldwin>), Anderson says, is a livelihood that depends on looking good — with all the pressures that entails. “This means they’ll work that much harder than anyone else and a good example of this is Gwyneth, for whom I design a new program every 10 days — she isn’t just doing the odd gym class, but working out between one-and-a-half to two hours every day, six days a week.” Add to that a team of personal trainers, private chefs and nannies to look after the baby so you can exercise for hours at a time, and you too can perhaps get a cover of your own. The question is, would you want to?





### Confronting your own post-baby body reality

The average women gains between 10 and 15kg during pregnancy (<http://www.kidspot.com.au/weightgain/pregnancyweightgain-result.asp>), and although there's a school of thought that says "it took you nine months to get that way so you should give yourself at least another nine to get back", there's still a good chance it may not go back — period, says vice president of Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists ([ranzog.edu.au](http://ranzog.edu.au)) associate professor Stephen Robson.

"Pregnancy can bring a multitude of changes such as cellulite, stretch marks, varicose veins and darkened moles — many of which can become permanent," he says.

"I realise those who put a lot of stock in looking good can feel depressed about these changes, but sometimes there's very little you can do about it so it's worth looking at them as a sign that you're a healthy mum with a healthy body that's done what it's designed to do."

That isn't to say lose all hope — there's still plenty you can do to improve your body realistically, says Ricardo Riskalla of RawFit ([rawfit.com.au](http://rawfit.com.au)), official trainer for IMG Models. "Genetics plays a part of course, but so too does your physical fitness history and how much exercise you did during pregnancy." Eating a decent diet with plenty of lean proteins, lots of organic vegetables and good oils will get you off on the right track. "If in doubt, eat foods that don't have any packaging — as fresh as possible." Start exercising with daily walks and once you've built up the kind of fitness where you're not getting puffed out during a brisk walk, talk to a trainer about tailoring a program just for you. And lastly, remember that when it comes to post-pregnancy bodies, there's no simple fixes.

"Celebrities might make it look effortless, but it never is," says Anderson. "Like anything else, it's about getting out what you put in — and it's as simple and as difficult as that."

### Quick exercises you can try

1. Walk. Pop baby in the pram and set aside 30 minutes to walk each day, recommends Ricardo Riskalla. "Incorporate hills as a challenge, and be sure to add a further 10 minutes onto your walk with each passing week."
2. Mummy and Me classes. Join an outdoor fitness class such as Yummy Mummy's Outdoor Fitness Group ([yummymummysfitness.com.au](http://yummymummysfitness.com.au)) where a personal trainer will put mums (along with their bubs) through their paces in a local park.
3. Push-ups. Watching TV? Use the time to do push-ups, an all-over exercise that tones and strengthens the core, arms and shoulders, says Riskalla. "Start with 10 reps a day and add two reps each week until you reach 50 or (preferably) 100." It's best to get clearance with your doctor before you begin.
4. Baby yoga. Strengthen those tummy muscles and recapture calm by taking in mummy and baby yoga classes such as the one run by Yogamama ([yogamama.com.au](http://yogamama.com.au)). Many also have "after-hour" sessions for mums only, perfect when you just really need to get away.
5. Run. Take a daily, early morning run, suggests Riskalla who adds that it tones the legs and — due to high repetition — doesn't create bulk. Seek clearance from your doctor first and if you can, run under the guidance of a trainer.
6. Watch a DVD. Put bub to bed and work out in the comfort of your living room with a DVD such as Tracy Anderson's Post-Pregnancy Workout.
7. Insist on me-time. Whether it's time to go for a brisk walk, meditate or even just quiet time to drink a coffee, insist in a daily 30-minute slot that's all about you and your mental health.
8. Go swimming. Pop baby (and dad) in baby swim classes and use that time to take in 30 minutes worth of laps.
9. Go online. Can't get away? Sign up to an interactive online yoga class and have your lessons streamed live right to the comfort of your living room. Check out Mr and Mrs Pose ([mrandmrspose.com](http://mrandmrspose.com)).
10. Eat smart. If you can, sign up to a complete meal delivery service such as Marley Spoon ([marleyspoon.com.au](http://marleyspoon.com.au)). Having wholesome meal kits (and recipes) delivered straight to your door reduces the risk of eating junk and you can order meals tailored for young families.