

*My Tribe*  
BE PART OF SOMETHING

# Postnatal Exercise

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A week by week guide to returning to activity



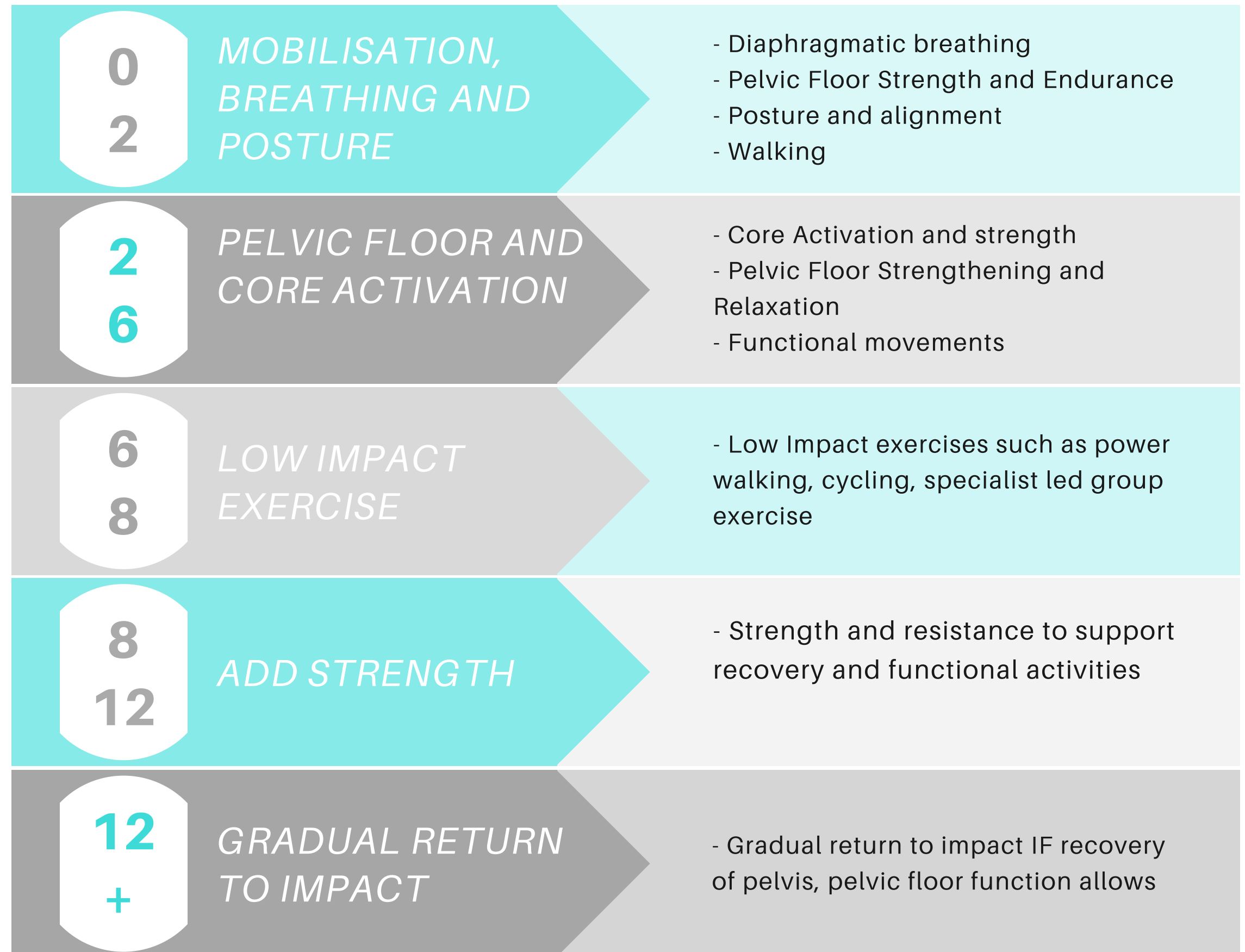
## Returning to Exercise after having a baby

Having a baby can be one of the most life changing experiences you'll ever encounter. Physically, your body will have gone through structural changes and without doubt, you'll experience emotional changes too. Throw in retuning to exercise and it can all be very overwhelming. Trying to understand what is "safe", what is recommended, what you "should" and "shouldn't" do can be a minefield. This guide is intended to help with that by giving a generic overview of what you could do to try and facilitate a safe and progressive return to exercise. Of course every birth is different and what is right for one person may be quite different to the next. Listen to your body and take your time. If you had a c section you may want to wait a little longer before you start out. In the Guide you will find references to "how to" videos and exercises. These can be found in the Workout Area of my website, [www.thisismytribe.co.uk](http://www.thisismytribe.co.uk)

In all cases it is recommended that you seek the advice of your GP before you commence an exercise programme and at any point if you have concerns.

# Postnatal Exercise Progression Week by Week Overview

Progressions and stages subject to individual recovery, birth experience and postnatal conditions. Should be regressed as necessary. If anything doesn't feel right or causes pain, stop and seek medical advice. You may be cleared to come back to it at a later stage. Give your body the time it needs to recover.





# Week 0-2

Early days postpartum - Focus on rest, recovery and slow movement

## POSTURE AND ALIGNMENT

- Try to keep your rib cage stacked on top of your pelvis, growing tall through the torso. Think of lengthening up through the crown of the head
- Allow a gentle curve of the lower back but avoid sticking your bum out.
- When standing try to plant evenly through both feet with hips level
- **Knee rolls and pelvic tilts** may feel good. Take a look at the Early Days Stretch and Mobilise Video on the website

## JUST BREATHE!

- Easier said than done. Your rib cage may be aching and your breathing may seem shallow
- Take a breath in, allow your rib cage to expand. Imagine your pelvic floor filling up with air
- As you exhale, observe your rib cage deflate and your pelvic floor lifting upwards

## PELVIC FLOOR STRENGTHENING, ENDURANCE AND RELAXATION

- Start when you feel ready. Use the breathing technique above to get you started. Try up to 10 gentle lifts, pulling up and inwards on an exhale ensuring you fully relax between each lift. This technique is called a **kegal**
- Try to hold 1 lift in place for up to 10 seconds to encourage endurance.

## WALKING

- Don't go too far too soon. Try walking around the block and then go a little further each day. Enjoy the fresh air Think about posture when walking with the buggy. Handles to hips and walking tall

## CUDDLE YOUR BABY!

You don't need any permission for this. Don't rush getting back to exercise. Enjoy those early days bonding with your baby, recovering and resting. Your body has been through a lot and you deserve to take your time.

# Week 2-6

Early days postpartum - Focus on adding in some light movement, glute and core activation

## STRETCHING AND MOBILITY

- Build on the movements from weeks 0-2. Try some cat cows to get some movement through your back and pelvic floor.
- Open up the chest and rib cage by lengthening out the arms. Try taking one arm up and over to the side. This will help counteract the constant arching over when feeding your baby

## CORE ACTIVATION

- Keep going with your deep, diaphragmatic breathing. Try for 10 breaths. This is great to calm you down when things feel a little overwhelming
- Some **heel slides** or **supine knee** raises might work for you now. Lying on your back with knees bent, try raising a knee in towards you, one at a time, slowly and with control. Try 5 on each side then try extending your heel out to lengthen the leg. Do this on the outbreath to help activate your core

## PELVIC FLOOR STRENGTHENING, ENDURANCE AND RELAXATION\*

- Gradually build up your kegal contractions. If you could do 5 last week can you increase to 10. Can you hold the long hold contraction and second or two longer. Aim for 2-3 times per day. Lengthening the pelvic floor is just as important to ensure a long and supple muscle. **Cat cows and reverse kegals** can help with this

## WALKING

- Can you go a little further than last week? Don't be afraid to take breaks.
- If walking causes you any pain or for things to feel a little uncomfortable, slow it down and scale back. Your body has done something incredible and it needs to recover.

## FUNCTIONAL MOVES

- Strong glutes will help support your pelvis and pelvic floor. See how a **glute bridge** feels to gently activate your glutes, core and pelvic floor
- raise up as you exhale, tilting the pelvis under and gently squeezing your bottom together at the top
- try 5 and slowly build up to 10

\*Kegals aren't the right approach for everyone. If you have a tight (hypertonic) pelvic floor, you need to focus on relaxation. If you're not sure talk to your GP or Physio

# Week 6 - 8

Time for your GP check - Low impact movement, increasing heart rate if your ready

## 6 - 8 WEEK CHECK

Whilst many refer to the 6 week check as being the "green light" for exercise and return to normal activity, remember this is not the ideal point for everyone, especially if you've had a C Section. You've been through a lot both physically and mentally. Take your time. Depending on the type of appointment you have you may or may not have a physical check. If not and you have concerns, request a face to face appointment before starting any new exercise plan.

## CORE MUSCLES - DIASTASIS

- If you didnt have one at your 6 week check, now might be a good time to check for signs that your core muscles are repairing. The tummy muscles natarurally widen during pregnancy to make way for your growing baby. If you have a "gap" that is perfectly normal. There are things you can do to help your core recover and also things to avoid during this time - talk to your instructor or to a womens physio / Mummy MOT practioner. Check the How To Video on the My Tribe Website

## PELVIC FLOOR STRENGTHENING, ENDURANCE AND RELAXATION

-If you've been managing to gradually increase your pelvic floor contractions, why not try doing them in different positions. Try doing them seated or even standing.,

## LOW IMPACT MOVEMENT

- Now might be the time you feel like you can go a little further. Maybe a power walk or some gentle cycling (if the saddle is comfortable) or cross training. Remember every one is different and do what feels good for your body

## FUNCTIONAL MOVES

- you might be ready to add some extra glute work now. Try some **squats** ensuring you are activating your core to protect your lower back. Watch out for knees going beyond your toes. This can cause knee pain.  
- if you're now free of any pelvic girdle pain, why not try adding in some **lunge** variations too.

# Week 8-12

Adding in some light strength and resistance work here may help with stabilisation

## STRENGTH

- Adding light resistance to lower limb and core work may help you start to feel a little fitter and stronger at this stage.
- Resistance bands are a great place to start or light dumbbells (1-2kg) or even tins out of the kitchen cupboard
- Scale back if weights cause any pain or symptom of pelvic floor dysfunction.

## STABILISING MOVES

- Whilst our core and pelvic area is recovering we can sometimes feel a little off balance. Single leg stability work can really help with this. Try a **rear lunge with a knee raise or balancing on one leg and moving into a T shape** to start challenging your core. You can hold on to a wall if you need to and then slowly work towards maintaining balance

## PELVIC FLOOR STRENGTHENING, ENDURANCE AND RELAXATION

- If you've been managing to gradually increase your pelvic floor contractions, why not try doing them in different positions. if last week you tried seated, move now to standing.
- Remember to breathe and relax. Mum life can be stressful and we can sometime hold tension in areas where you'd least expect it.

## LOW IMPACT MOVEMENT

- If you've started to increase your activity, you might want to continue with this by starting to work towards the activities you enjoyed before or during your pregnancy.
- Your body will be full of relaxin, a hormone produced to help during childbirth. This will have a loosening effect on your joints so be careful not to overdo it by rushing to high impact activity or anything too fast paced

## FUNCTIONAL MOVES

- **Deadlifts** are a great exercise to add in now. As a mum you'll be lifting all day whether that be your baby, the changing bag, the car seat. The deadlift will help strengthen your legs, back and glutes to assist you in carrying out day to day activities.

# Week 12 and beyond

Continuation of light cardio, progressively adding strength work and adding impact if and when body is ready

## GRADUAL RETURN TO IMPACT AND RUNNING

- Slowly does it! A walk to run programme based on the Couch to 5K is a great place to start building up progressively each week
- As your body continues to recover and strengthen you might want to tentatively try out some moves that are higher impact like squat jumps, running or burpees. Don't go all out straight away. Try a few. How does it feel? Scale up or down where you need to
- A good postnatal fitness instructor should be able to advise you on the right modifications for you to enable you to build up at YOUR pace.

## STRENGTH WORK

- Mums spend a lot of time lifting. Lifting babies, lifting car seats, changing bags and so on! Building up upper body strength will really help support day to day activity - especially as your baby gets bigger.
- Breathe out as you lift to avoid too much pressure through your recovering pelvic floor and core.
- **Press ups, bicep curls and squat presses** are a great place to start and can easily be modified. Try sitting on a chair (for weighted exercises) or using a wall for support for exercises like press ups.

## LOOK FOR SIGNS THAT YOUR BODY MIGHT NOT BE READY

- have you noticed signs of leaking?
- are you getting pains beyond achy muscles
- Do you have a feeling of heaviness or dragging in your pelvic area?
- Do you have diastasis recti?
- If you had a C section, how is your scar feeling?
- Always seek medical advice if you have concerns

## TAKE IT STEADY

-If your body is telling you its not quite time, it doesn't mean you wont get there. If impact and running cause you to have symptoms, dont ignore them. Focus on repairing and strengthening your core and pelvic floor and you'll be back to those activities that you love in no time

## STRIVE FOR BALANCE

-There is no doubt that movement and exercise will make you feel amazing both physically and mentally. Find the thing that works for you and do it when you can. Mum life is busy and at times hard. Fitting in exercise can be a real challenge. Do what you can and enjoy it.





## Because every birth is different

Every pregnancy, every birth is different. What works for one lady might not work for you. You might need a little longer to recover. You might not feel able to walk around the block for some time, let alone go to an exercise class. Remember this a guide, not a definitive timeline and may be regressed based on you and your body.

Some ladies need a little more support. Maybe you have a specific postnatal condition such as diastasis recti (the thinning and widening of the connective tissue around the abdominal muscles - a NORMAL consequence of pregnancy) or a feeling of heaviness in the vagina. I can tailor exercises to help with these conditions and to ensure you feel safe in class. There are local specialists who can help you with this too. A womens physio will help you with your recovery and may even suggest some aids to help you manage day to day. Talk to your GP if you're unsure who may refer you to the NHS Women's Health Team if appropriate. Locally we are lucky to have an incredible Senior Physiotherapist, Scar Therapist and Mummy MOT Practitioner, Hannah Poulton of HLP Therapy. You can find her details here [www.hlp-therapy.co.uk](http://www.hlp-therapy.co.uk)





### ***Tribe Foundations***

Group based, virtual or 1:1 focusing on building strength and repairing weakness in the core and pelvic floor. Pilates and functional based exercises designed to increase stability



### ***Mummy Tribe***

Indoor, postnatal exercise class without the need for childcare. Circuit based designed to gradually improve fitness and strength. Suitable from 6 weeks (8-12 weeks c section)



### ***Buggy Tribe***

Outdoor, postnatal exercise class incorporating your buggy to promote fitness and stability. Suitable from 6 weeks (8-12 weeks C Section)



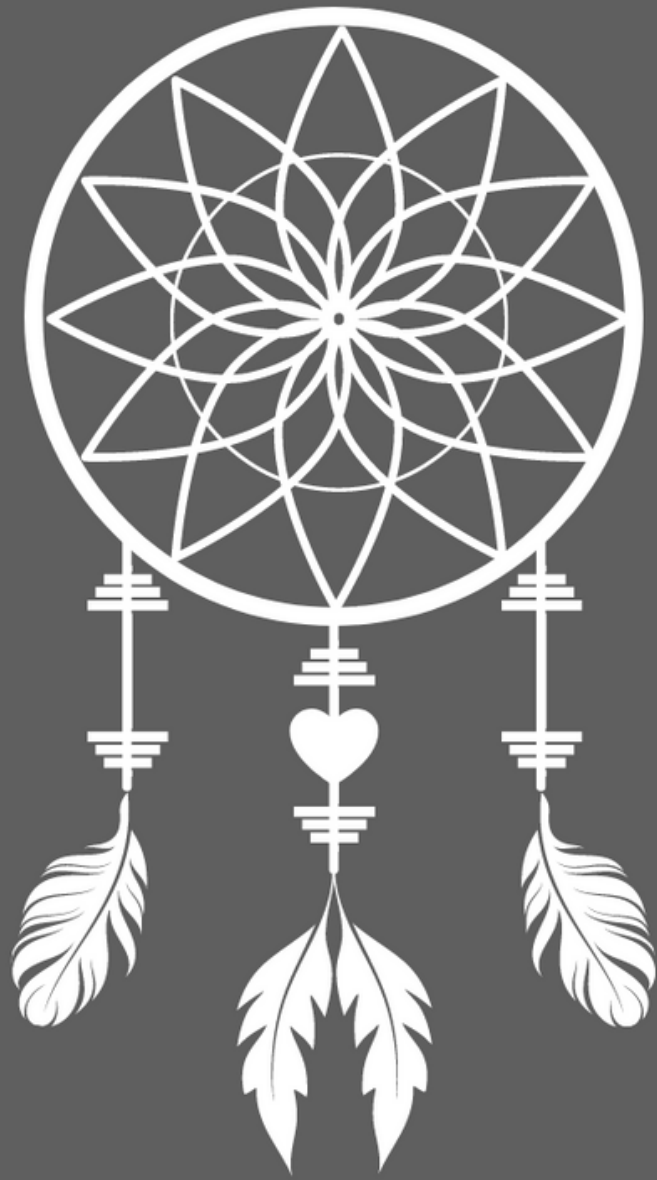
### ***Fit Tribe Virtual***

For those that prefer to workout in the comfort of their own home. All the fun and focus of Mummy Tribe at the time that works for you. Follow along live or on catch up. Suitable from 6 weeks (8-12 weeks C Section)



### ***Tribe Solo***

For those that prefer a more tailored, individualised approach to fitness. Park based or at your home. Packages available. Suitable from 6 weeks (8-12 weeks C Section)



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