

TIMELINE FOR THE PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM ATHLETE



About Your Coach

Brianna Battles is the Founder of Pregnancy & Postpartum Athleticism and CEO of Everyday Battles LLC.

She specializes in coaching pregnant and postpartum athletes, as well as educating coaching professionals on how to help athletes navigate the physical and mental considerations of training during these chapters in a woman's life. She is a relentless advocate and relatable resource for women who want training during pregnancy and make a sustainable return to performance, lifestyle, function, career, and activity postpartum (and postpartum is forever)! This effort is what led to her creating a curriculum for her colleagues- coaches and practitioners- who also want to support athletes through this process.



Brianna has well established, successful online education, programs, and resources for fitness professionals, practitioners, and athletes. She has built an international team of P&PA Coaches who are equipped to work with pregnant and postpartum athletes in their communities and online.

She has experience coaching a variety of athletes, ranging from professional and collegiate athletes to the recreational exerciser. This is how she cultivated a top-down approach to her coaching culture. She has helped many athletes manage core, pelvic health, orthopedic and other physical challenges while still encouraging their athletic goals and pursuits.

Brianna has her Master's Degree in Coaching and Athletic Administration and her Bachelor's degree in Kinesiology. She is an active member of the NSCA where she is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS), and a USAW Sports Performance Coach. She has completed multiple continuing education courses and mentorships in the women's health and strength and conditioning realm.

She lives in Southern California with her husband and 2 sons (Cade and Chance).

Intro

You are likely reading this because you want some guidance on how to navigate your training, when to modify and when to reintroduce a movement. It would be extremely shortsighted if I listed 20 exercises to do, or not do, when to eliminate them and when to re-introduce them. While this can be done to an extent, it's not the information you actually need to make informed decisions regarding training through pregnancy and postpartum. We commonly hear, in a variety of contexts, that "it's not what you do, but how you do it." This completely applies to pregnancy and postpartum athleticism, with our intention- our WHY- being the foundation of our training decisions. It must extend beyond the conventional advice of listening to your body, making basic modifications (aka "just don't do abs") and doing what you've always done.

Instead of thinking in terms of "good or bad" exercises, think about the THEMES that exist during the different phases of pregnancy and postpartum. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to exercise considerations, EVER. Every body, experience level, pregnancy, delivery, recovery, symptom, etc is incredibly different. Growing a baby and recovering from delivery (regardless of how the baby was born), is the common denominator for every pregnant and postpartum athlete! Therefore, having tools to recognize ways to better **structure the approach to training** with increased awareness to the changed or changing **structure of our body**, is key. Your body is different right now, therefore, your training needs to be slightly different to accommodate for those changes now, on behalf of long term core and pelvic health function, as well as performance.

When a coach or athlete can conceptualize general, yet evolving, training themes, it becomes easier to navigate the concerns and confusion surrounding "what to do/ not to do," and the "when to stop and when to begin x,y or z." They can better measure the benefit or consequence of a movement, depending on the current stage their body is in. It must extend beyond if it's just safe for the baby or if you can perform, it comes down to if you should and your why (what's the ultimate goal?). The goal is to have a healthy pregnancy, intentional recovery and rebuilding chapter that preserves and restores your core, pelvic health and fitness in the ways that can be controlled.

Athletes really struggle to self-regulate during pregnancy and returning to the gym postpartum! It's easy to feel "exempt" from general pregnancy exercise recommendations because the baseline of athleticism, body awareness and experience is above average! We identify with more of an "extreme" approach to pregnancy fitness, vs walking and prenatal Yoga. There is NOTHING wrong with walking or Yoga if that's what an athlete enjoys, but for many women reading this, barbells, running and burpees resonate more with their athletic interest. It is easy to assume, and we are often told that we will "bounce back" post birth, and that what we do during pregnancy dictates that return process. However, there's no



bouncing back, there is only moving forward with your evolving life, body, circumstances and interests. This chapter is unpredictable, so we control what we can through fully informed education around our training, and surrender to the variables that are not within our control.

We can still do what we enjoy, in the environment we like, if we understand how to actually listen to our body, adjust our training and adapt instead of trying to maintain. Ego, fear and control often get in the way of our decision making. None of us are exempt from needing to make adjustments that take into account our changing body, core and pelvic health, recovering from pregnancy, delivery, symptoms and then appropriately progressing our fitness toward our goals in a sustainable way.

Athletes look to coaches to guide, but more often than not, coaches do not have the all encompassing tools and resources to provide this specific guidance (unless *shameless plug* they are certified as a [Pregnancy & Postpartum Athleticism Coach](#)). In return, coaches look to athletes to self-guide and regulate. That's not what coaches are supposed to do! Coaches and athletes should be working together with trust, evidence and specific, not generalized, information.

Pregnant and postpartum women are not a “special population,” in fact, they make up a huge majority of people who go to the gym, take classes, do personal training, etc. Everyone knows how to modify an exercise, but athletes and coaches both need to know how and when to adjust the demand and the implications the movement, intensity, volume or strategy has on core and pelvic health during pregnancy and after.

Dialing in these general themes will help guide the pregnant and postpartum athlete mindset and approach to training.



1ST TRIMESTER

Mindfulness - How do you feel?

An athlete may experience significant fatigue, nausea and sickness, OR she may feel fairly "normal." Honor that this is the beginning of physiological changes that will continually occur, and adapt training intensity accordingly! There is no shame in taking time away from a typical gym routine to rest and acclimate to these current symptoms and feelings. This would also be a great time to get familiar with implementing a different breath and movement strategy. This online course is the first line of defense for all of my athletes to understand how to approach their pregnancy in a way that takes into account core and pelvic health, relatable athleticism and mindset.

Modifications:

As long as energy permits, routine can typically stay consistent. It's not a time to try and progress or challenge, but mostly maintain what feels comfortable without pushing boundaries. Discontinue high risk movements, activity, etc Examples: rope climbing, snowboarding, contact sports, competition, etc

2ND TRIMESTER

Adjust and Acclimate

During the second trimester, energy levels may return and nausea or vomiting may reduce. This is encouraging for many athletes, as they begin to feel better! The athlete will also begin to experience the structural changes of pregnancy (growing belly, breasts, hips, etc), therefore her awareness of adjusted movement, tendencies and strategy will need to be dialed in to keep her healthy, proactive, and strong moving forward through pregnancy and into postpartum. Establishing and implementing a new "strategy" early on in pregnancy that accommodates the structural changes and demand on the core and pelvic floor is incredibly helpful for longterm function and performance!

Modifications:

- Eliminate high impact (running, jumping, etc).
- Discontinue dynamic/gymnastic type movements (burpees, handstand push ups, muscle ups, kipping pull ups)
- Discontinue ab specific work (toes to bar, sit ups, planking, etc).
- Strength: drop loads so that it does not require strain or a breath hold Olympic lifting- reduce volume, load, etc. When the bar path is changed due to your stomach, eliminate barbell work and use dumbbells or kettlebells in- stead to not impact the quality of your bar path.



3RD TRIMESTER

Prepare and adjust variables

How do you feel? Many athletes will continue to feel good in their training, but ALL athletes will need to have heightened awareness and an adjusted mindset of “just because I can doesn’t necessarily mean I should for where my body is at *right now.*

This means that more often than not, I advise pregnant athletes to decrease volume, intensity, load and increase awareness and implementation of their new core and pelvic health strategies (breath and pressure management, movement patterns adjustments, etc) to meet demands of their energy, body changes, symptoms and mindset.

Pregnant athletes do not need to “train for birth,” because their baseline of fitness is already well established. They need to train their mind and body for postpartum recovery. They need awareness of the potential of, and/or current core and pelvic health symptoms (including, but not limited to: leaking, pelvic pain/ pressure, coning of the abdomen, etc) that are not worth creating, aggravating or dismissing during pregnancy. There is NO need to “exercise the baby out,” or push limits close to the due date. Movement is encouraged, but there is also a lot of benefit to winding down energy output and letting the body rest, preparing for labor, delivery and recovery.



Modifications:

- Similar to the first and second trimester (honor energy levels, eliminate high impact, dynamic movements)
- Reduce volume (less reps) and load (less weight).
- It should feel “too easy”
- Reduce intensity of workouts - moderate pace
- Reduce volume OR eliminate overhead pressing and pulling (examples: push press, thrusters, wall ball, pull ups, overhead squats, etc)

“Intention now for intensity later” is the theme of my [8 week postpartum athlete training program](#), but that same theme must carry an athlete through pregnancy and into her postpartum recovery phase and beyond as she navigates her evolving body and experiences.

4TH TRIMESTER

The intention of the 4th trimester is to transition, acclimate and nurture the new baby and healing body. The gym may be a tool that is typically used for self-care and health, but during a vulnerable time like the 4th trimester, postpartum athletes need to be encouraged to care for their healing body (and new baby!) in deliberate, not desperate, ways. This can be achieved by emphasizing sleep and rest to restore a healing, sleep deprived body.

Eating to nourish the body, not restricting calories or eliminating food groups, will also assist in recovery. If a woman chooses to breastfeed, consuming adequate calories and water is essential.

Focusing on breath work is helpful for rehabbing and connecting to the core and pelvic floor. It also sets the foundation for habits to integrate into exercise. Improved tendencies, awareness of habits and rehab make a big difference for athletes looking to return to the exercise. A postpartum athlete cannot pick up where she left off, she has to rebuild in a way she never has before- from the inside out, that takes her vagina into consideration. This simply means, she needs help beyond her own level of understanding...

Prior to returning to the gym, it is highly advised that an athlete is assessed by a Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist/Physiotherapist (virtually or in person). This practitioner provides details on a healing body that no other practitioner can thoroughly assess. Regardless of delivery type and experience, having this feedback and care is essential for long term health, function and performance. It is also highly suggested to work with a [Pregnancy and Postpartum Athleticism Coach](#) and if that's not possible, my 8 Week Postpartum Athlete Training Program can complement the rehab you are doing with your Pelvic Floor PT, and help guide your return to the gym in a way that takes into account your core, pelvic health and athletic interest.

Find a Pelvic Floor PT or Physiotherapist near you:

GOOGLE pelvic floor physical therapy + [location]

- American Physical Therapy Assc: Section of Pelvic Health (APTA-US)
- Herman and Wallace Institute (US)
- Canadian Physiotherapy Association: Women's Health Division Pelvic, Obstetrical, and Gynaecological Physiotherapy (POPG-UK)
- Australian Physiotherapy Association (Women's, Men's, and Pelvic Health Division)
- Pelvic Guru: Global Pelvic Health Alliance



“INTENTION NOW, INTENSITY LATER.”

-Brianna Battles



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3-6 MONTHS

Generally speaking, this is a time where a postpartum body begins to regulate a bit more. Reintroduction of movement and the beginning the re-building phase of training variables (volume, gradual loading, intensity, etc) with a solidified strategy and awareness of potential or current symptoms, will help guide what the body is or is not ready for! It's important to keep in mind that this is still a re-introduction phase, even for the most experienced athletes! The body has been "compromised" and not in its typical form (lack of sleep alone impacts our ability to perform), so taking the time to re-familiarize with fundamentals is critical! Working with a Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist or P&PA coach is incredibly helpful for guiding individual needs.

Returning to your training:

"Running and abs" should ideally resume with the guidance of a qualified coach and should not create symptoms. This is still a vulnerable time to add high demand (impact and ab work) on a healing system. Master body weight movements, basic exercises, light loads and begin to re-introduce more consistent routine. Training should not exhaust you, it should complement your energy for that day. The rebuilding process takes a lot of time, even when you "feel good," trust that a gradual process is a sustainable one.

6-9 MONTHS

As training and movements become more consistent and familiar, athletes need to "walk the line," progressing load, volume, intensity, impact, demand, etc gradually. This is NOT a time to assume the body is ready to hit a new PR (personal record), but working toward previous levels of fitness and building upon the fundamentals (while monitoring symptoms!), will lead a postpartum athlete toward sustainable fitness and performance!

Introduce:

- Heavier weight and higher skill/demand with LOW REPS (gymnastics, olympic lifting)
- Running longer distance, or faster pace (if appropriate)
- Ab exercises (low volume, with awareness of diastasis recti)
- More intensity- pushing the workouts more, IF able and have built to that capacity



9-12 MONTHS

A postpartum woman may experience a feeling of transition, where she begins to feel a bit more like herself in training and lifestyle. This has a lot to do with the foundation she has set, time spent recovering from birth, building her training variables and acclimating to life with a new baby! As long as she has gradually made an effort to move toward building strength, intensity, volume, impact, etc without symptoms, she can keep pursuing the climb of versatile athleticism.

Keep building upon the same principles and movement guidelines from the previous months, mastering quality over quantity, knowing you're still EARLY postpartum.

12+ MONTHS

At 12 months postpartum, an athlete who has followed this general timeline based on individual needs, will likely feel confident building and growing her athleticism. It is vital for health and performance that menstruation, breast- feeding, strength, sleep, core or pelvic health symptoms and injuries are considerations she has when training and resuming “normal” levels of fitness. Awareness, not obsession, will allow a postpartum athlete to make quality and individual training decisions, modifications and progress as she pursues further fitness goals.

Some athletes may have total clearance and feel great, while others may have significant restrictions still. You cannot compare yourself to others, or even to this timeline estimate. [Seeking individual help from a coach](#) (we do remote coaching!) and pelvic floor physical therapist is a critical step for understanding your specific considerations.



CONCLUSION

This is a very general timeline and we know that every woman's experience with pregnancy and postpartum recovery is different. How one athlete feels at x months postpartum will be incredibly different than another athlete who had a different pregnancy, delivery, recovery, symptom, injury, history, sleep deprivation or mental health consideration. Healing and athleticism are not linear; but training themes, considerations, patience and an adjusted mindset can have a beneficial carry over to long term function and fitness pursuits.

There are SO many variables to juggle as an athlete mom. Accepting that pregnancy and postpartum is a SMALL part on our spectrum of athleticism and motherhood helps to be patient with this challenging process! It's ok to take time away, to be inconsistent, to move and progress at your own rate. It's ok to be frustrated and grateful at the same time! You are not your ability, your body, your symptoms or your moment in time. You are evolving and acclimating, continually.

Progress, ESPECIALLY postpartum, is also NEVER linear. There will be good, consistent phases and there will be challenging, inconsistent and more sedentary times, and it's all ok because this is a temporary phase in our lifetime of athletic endeavors and abilities.

Focus on the general theme suggestions, and trust that the process of intention, advocacy and awareness will prevail.

I am with you,

Brianna Battles, MS, CSCS
Founder: Pregnancy & Postpartum Athleticism
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SUGGESTED RESOURCES

[The Pregnant Athlete Training Program \(an at home version available\)](#)

This is a 36 week training program that was created to strategically guide workouts through the duration of pregnancy. It does the thinking, modifying and teaching for you, so all you have to do is follow the workouts provided, with the trust that you're training in a way that will keep your body, baby and fitness in mind.

[8 Week Postpartum Athlete Training Program](#)

This postpartum program has been used by thousands of athletes, ranging in athletic interest and ability. Each phase prioritizes core and pelvic health rehab, while rebuilding fitness capacity strategically.

[Pregnancy & Postpartum Athleticism \(for coaches\)](#)

Pregnancy & Postpartum Athleticism is an online certification program for coaches and practitioners who want to better support pregnant and postpartum athletes. Join the team of coaches around the world who are leading their communities, gym and practice with unique expertise and recognition.

