



# A baby and a flat stomach?

Fitness expert Marek Doyle shares his secrets

**B**eing a have-it-all mum has never been so difficult. Judging by the figures sported by new mums such as Coleen McLoughlin, the growing list of requirements now includes a firm and flat midriff. While pregnancy and abdominal definition have never tended to go hand in hand, it is possible to make this a reality; however, it can only become so by specifically addressing the issues faced by new mothers.

Both standard births and C-sections can disrupt the function of the abdominal muscles. The abdominus rectis, internal obliques and transverse abdominus can all suffer trauma during this procedure. The central nervous system often adapts to the pain caused by contracting these muscles by turning off the connection to them. Although this stops the pain in the short-term, these muscles stop functioning the way they should. A familiar loss of tone is the result, with no

amount of crunches making the slightest bit of difference. The good news is that these muscles can be activated once more. Depending on the muscle involved, there are many floor exercises that can stimulate the neural pathway involved and overhaul abdominal function in a matter of weeks.

Next up is dealing with any fat remaining in front of the abs. This involves two aspects; first, reducing the total level of body fat and, secondly, addressing any hormonal imbalance that can result in disproportionate fat retention around the midriff. This can occur due to excessive levels of cortisol, your body's major stress hormone. This is released from the adrenal glands and can be stimulated by psychological stress, poor sleep, hunger and even infection. It is crucial that you do all you can to obtain sufficient sleep, and eat regularly throughout the day. Rarely do I consult a new mum who is doing both.

In regards to reducing the overall levels of body fat, you must eat sufficient protein, sufficient good fats, and keep the carbs at an appropriate level. It also means resistance training twice a week – don't bother running unless you want to look like the wobbly runners that line up at the starting line of every major marathon.

While these recommendations are simple, they are not always easy. Clients report that making and maintaining the changes can be tough, although gets easier once a routine is established.

Marek Doyle is a personal trainer and nutritionist located in South Kensington. In 2008, he was recognised as one of the top three trainers in the country and counts world champion athletes and TV personalities amongst his clientele.

\* [www.blueprintfitness.co.uk](http://www.blueprintfitness.co.uk)