

**For Baby and Me: The tales of a feminist mother**

*By Alison Edwards*

Near the end of my pregnancy, my body was not my own. My stomach was huge; full of fluid and a large baby, my ankles were swollen to the point that I couldn't wear socks and even my maternity clothing was strained on me. Even my delivery, a long tale of induction creams and ultimately a cesarean was not how I planned to end this forty-week experience. My body was not my own and my ability to plan how I would feel and what it would do day to day - even minute to minute - was lost.

After pregnancy and delivery, I still have issues with my body. Most of it has returned to normal, excepting the stomach muscles that were cut in the operation. I can wear socks now, and the need to go to the washroom every fifteen minutes has vanished. However, my body still is not the one that I wore before the stick turned blue.

One major change is my breasts. Everyone has seen them, from my fitness instructor to my dad to the lady that was sitting next to me at the cinema. I breast feed anywhere from five to fifteen times a day and so far, my sons appetite for breast milk hasn't seemed to lessen, despite the solids that he is now eating. My breasts are no longer the sexual mounds of joy that they once were. Instead, they provide sustenance to a human being - in many ways they're my most useful body part. They do make it hard to find t-shirts and I'm now in an 'E' cup which cuts down on the cute bras I can find, but they're a useful change.

Not as useful is the weight gain. During my pregnancy I found I could finally eat according to the food guide. I had multigrain and peanut butter, milk and meat. To a certain extent, I didn't watch how much I ate: I ate until I was full and began again when I was hungry. Something that I believe you're supposed to do to ensure a healthy lifestyle. Now that my baby is born, my body isn't where it used to be - I have a stomach roll that, six months later is still a little numb from the caesarean, and I'm wearing a size or two bigger than I used to because of this. It's not the body that I had going into this adventure and to be honest, I'm not sure I'll ever have that body again.

According to popular culture, body issues after giving birth are to be expected. With the rash of celebrity mothers that has occurred in the past year and a half, there have been articles on body and motherhood in most, if not all of the celebrity gossip magazines. Most are praising the weight loss that has occurred after birth and how quickly these actresses and musicians returned to their prebirth weight and shape. However, the methods used are not ones accessible to the average new mother. Kate Hudson hired two trainers, worked out two to three hours a day and ate a variety of small meals throughout the day. These actions helped her lose the sixty pounds in four months. (Gold, 4) Uma Thurman lost twenty-five pounds in six weeks by having healthy meals delivered to her as

well as hiring a personal trainer/nutritionist. (Gold, 3) Catherine Zeta Jones followed portion control and Atkins, along with the help of her personal nutritionist and lost the fifty pounds she'd gained in pregnancy. (Gold, 2). Admittedly, Gwyneth Paltrow refuses to diet, wanting to do gentle exercise instead (World Entertainment News Network).

Two things stand out with these stories. One is that these women had a large amount of weight to lose and did so in a short amount of time. This action is deemed medically unhealthy, especially if you are a breastfeeding mother: toxins can enter the breast milk with a weight loss of more than three pounds per month (Stovsky, 1). The other is the use of the word 'hired'. None of these women returned to themselves relying just on themselves. For a new mother - or at least for this new mother - there's an awful lot to do that doesn't involve losing weight. I spend my life taking care of another human being who can't take care of himself, while trying to ensure that I don't lose myself in the process. There is no nanny, nutritionist, trainer or cook in my household, nor does our budget allow for one. Nor to I have three hours to work out daily - the exercise class that I try to go to three times a week is a stretch some days and that's only an hour long! Experts agree on this point. Doctor Yehudi Gordon has been quoted as saying:

"these celebrities have taken time off to spend each day actively pursuing the result they want with the help of a team of experts, from nannies to personal trainers and dieticians.. Most ordinary woman do not have these options open to them". (BBCnews)

So why do we expect these results? And, why is there an obsession with motherhood and celebrity bodies? In a July 2004 article Salon.com called it 'Pregnancy Porn' and detailed how society has become obsessed with the celebrity process of becoming pregnant, the weight gained during pregnancy and how it was lost after pregnancy. However, the point is made that just as women compare themselves to celebrities in nongestational life, they also compare themselves while celebs are pregnant: did I look like that then? Does she look better in her maternity jeans than I did? (Traister, 3). We then compare after the baby is born - and many of us come up short. After sharing an experience, finances and occupation once again divide us - their well paying job is to be thin, mine is not. Another reason could be that celebrities are there; they're part of our lives and our environment. We may not have had a pregnant friend but we were able to follow the struggles that Courtney Cox overcame while pregnant at the **exact same time** that we were.

Post baby, accepting my body has been a struggle. While part have their uses, like the rest of my life, it has been dramatically changed due to the arrival of my son. Perhaps, like many things in my life now, I should just accept that this - that I - am no longer the same as I was seven months ago, much less who I was a year and a half ago. I am healthy, I am strong, I am larger than I was but I fit the standards of me. And daily I have a little face looking at me as if I'm the most beautiful person in the world. That's one external source I should listen to.

Gold, Alana. "How Celebrities Shed Their Pregnancy Weight." Truestar Health. 2004. 1 Nov 2004.

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