

The Secrets to their Success

Meet four women who are passionate about helping others achieve their health & fitness goals



Michelle Rosenberg & Lauren Gabriel

creators of Preggi Bellies

You may not have heard of their names, but you would have heard of their enterprise. In just a few short years, physiotherapists Michelle Rosenberg and Lauren Gabriel have trained over 1500 pregnant women in their fitness program Preggi Bellies, dispelling the myth that pregnant women should not exercise.

Why do you think pregnancy and exercise is such a grey area.

I would say that most people who know exercise don't know less risk of miscarriage. And that's where we come in.

How did Preggi Bellies come about.

We were introduced to the concept of using the exercise ball, by the company that makes Mediball. At that stage gyms weren't interested in the concept of the

pregnancy and exercise. Even though there's a heap of research out there showing that women who exercise when pregnant are so much better off than those who don't, people are scared. The biggest fear is that exercise will cause miscarriage. However, the research shows that women who exercise have hormonal issues. Women are very hormonal. Sometimes they'll have bad days and they'll yell and scream at you because they've had a fight or they woke up feeling fat. We don't take what they say seriously when they're angry. Because we understand that sometimes

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ball – yet now they're everywhere – and certainly the idea of pregnant women exercising was something that gyms didn't do. So we decided to tap into a new market, which was pregnant women exercising, using the ball.

As a mother yourself, how has the program benefited you.

I have three children. During the first two pregnancies I never exercised, but for the third one I did. With my third pregnancy my labour was shorter, I gained about eight kilos less and there was no difference with my eating – only with my activity. My recovery was phenomenally quick – I was back exercising two-to-three weeks after giving birth. I did not need a caeser or an episiotomy which I needed for the first two, and when I started getting the baby blues, I walked straight into an exercise class. That was my cure!

What is so unique about the Preggi Bellies program.

Ours is the first program that is specifically for pregnancy, in the past that's never been done. Initially we attracted exercising women, and then we started getting more and more women who had never exercised in their life. And after they'd had their babies, they never wanted to leave us. Because for the first time in their lives these women had stuck to an exercise program for a long period of time – they looked great, they felt great and they wanted to stay. Today about 40 per cent of women in the program are not pregnant.

What is the basic format of a Preggi Bellies class.

The exercise ball part of the workout is fantastic for cardio without impact. You can work as hard as you want to without putting any impact on your pelvis and then there is the step component, which the women love. Traditionally step classes are very complicated, very jumpy with lots of turning around. We don't do that. We designed our step workout to work the leg and the bum muscles and the backs of the back, and it also strengthens your tummy.

muscles and also the muscles in the front of the tummy. Those tend to separate when you're pregnant – they have to, to allow for the baby to grow. Research has shown that if you're doing abdominal work you lessen the likelihood of the abdominal muscles stretching too far, and you also prevent pelvic and back problems.

When should women begin a program with you.

Most women come to us in their first trimester, which is what I would recommend to everyone. We start women up to 30 weeks – beyond 30 weeks we've found that they're just not able to cope. Women continue with us all the way until their due date. We've had women go into labour in our classes.

What kind of results can they expect.

When you're talking about results you have to be careful. We don't discuss weight. We talk to women, not about weight, but about appearance. We talk to them about developing muscle tone for function. Increasing fitness is vital. Most women who

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start with us and get the whole way through will be fitter at the end of the pregnancy than they were at the beginning.

What are the benefits of exercise during pregnancy.

Certainly the recovery post-labour in women that exercise, is much quicker. The return to body shape – which is something that women place a huge emphasis on – is a lot quicker in women who exercise than those who don't.

Can it get quite emotional.

Definitely. But that's something we've always known having been pregnant

they're just not in control.

Is there a social aspect to the classes

Apparently there have been a lot of mother's groups that have been started and a lot of friendships formed. Women have had their second and third babies together.

As you know, women are having babies older and older, and less and less, so a lot of mothers come to these classes instead of the gym, in order to meet women in their area who are also pregnant.

What about women who aren't pregnant.

We've started getting that as well. Mostly because they like the type of exercise that we do and because we have a program designed especially for them. We actually have some women who are struggling to fall pregnant who come, because they believe in Karma.

They want to be surrounded by positive energy – instead of avoiding

pregnant women they want to be around them.

Have you had any success stories.

Yes we have.

What have you learnt over the years.

The most important thing I've learnt is that exercise is not a choice. Exercise is something that you have to do, when you wake up in the morning you brush your teeth, you don't think about it – you just do it. The other thing I've learnt is that women are incredibly strong. And they're incredibly capable of dealing with a number of situations.