



HOW ONE NEW MOM MOURNED
THE LOSS OF HER ONCE-TAUT
TUMMY BY ABIGAIL GREEN

belly flop

Prebaby, I spent a lot of time contemplating my navel. Literally. My firm stomach—honed by regular gym workouts and crunches in front of the TV—was the one part of my body I was unequivocally happy with (unlike, say, my thighs). I wore cropped yoga tops with confidence. On airplanes, I retrieved my carry-on bags from the overhead bin without a care about baring my midriff. I considered piercing my belly button.

Then I got pregnant. Before my eyes, my once-flat belly grew... and grew... and grew. Still, I was determined to stay in shape, even as my shape changed. I signed up for prenatal yoga and hired a personal trainer who was pregnant herself. She showed me how to safely modify my workouts to accommodate my burgeoning belly, build up my strength for labor and delivery, and, hopefully, bounce back to my prebaby body afterward.

Despite my exercise routine, my new physique inspired countless comments from strangers and loved ones alike. "Holy cow, you're huge!" said my ever-sensitive older brother. "You look like you swallowed a watermelon," remarked a random woman on an elevator. "Your stomach looks like a giant boob," said my husband the comedian. I had to admit he was right. By that point my belly button had popped like a turkey thermometer, signaling to the world that the bun in my oven was almost done.

packed a non-maternity shirt to wear home from the hospital. Thankfully the baby covered my gut in most of the pictures.

But I had little time to worry about my waistline. I spent my hours just gazing at my new baby—that is, between breastfeeding, recuperating, and wrestling with the snaps on tiny bodysuits. Then one day I realized that I looked only three months pregnant. A few weeks later, I stopped wearing maternity pants. I got back to my workouts. As slowly and imperceptibly as my stomach had expanded, it began to shrink. Other things got better too. I finally got the hang of breastfeeding, I no longer needed to sit on a rubber doughnut, and the nighttime crying fits subsided (mine, not the baby's). I was almost back to my old self.

Except for my stomach, that is. It's a little looser these days, a bit softer to the touch. A tiny constellation of pale stretch marks encircles my navel. And being turned inside out for months on end seems to have permanently changed my innie to an outie. Let's just say that bikinis are not in my future.

Do I mourn the loss of my once-perfect belly? A little. But who am I kidding? I'm 34, not 17. I've missed the belly-button-piercing window. Besides, I've got another navel to contemplate these days. And my baby's is much cuter than mine ever was.

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