

# SUPER (M)OMMS

*The miraculous process of growing a baby produces some pretty significant changes in a woman's body, mind, and emotional well-being. Five women tell us why it's crucial to cultivate an open, supportive and non-judgmental environment to achieve the healthiest motherhood journey – from pregnancy to birth and postpartum*

Photographs **KEEGAN CRASTO/PUBLIC BUTTER**

Fashion Director **PASHAM ALWANI**

Words **RADHIKA AGRAWAL**

**M**others are the ultimate endurance athletes. While the pregnancy journey ends after nine months, a mother's journey is lifelong. Motherhood is also a start of a new chapter of a woman's relationship with her body. In our country, most mothers are exposed to rigid beliefs passed on by friends and family, and have to conform to social and cultural expectations, believing them to be the 'ideals' of motherhood.

Many mothers are discouraged from being active during their pregnancy. With all the attention diverted towards the child, postpartum moms tend to drop out of their daily activity routine at a time when health and wellness are crucial.

Nike believes motherhood is the start of a new stage – not a stop – in a woman's wellness journey. Made for mothers by mothers, Nike's maternity collection, Nike (M), was designed to support them on the ultramarathon called motherhood.

What's remarkable is that the collection doesn't

look like maternity wear – instead, every piece grows with the mother by adapting to the changes in her body, ensuring that pre-pregnancy size stays with her from the first baby bump to the birth of her child and beyond. So, pregnant and postpartum moms can find the support they need to keep moving.

Five mothers in various stages of their pregnancies tell us about motherhood's less-discussed aspects, the everyday joys and challenges, and what fitness means to them.

With each mother's journey varying from the other, their experiences don't have a common thread, except that behind every perfect mother, there are imperfections she hides – stretch marks, baby weight, mood swings, lack of motivation, fatigue, mom guilt, and the inability to manage all.

Yet, many don't realise just how magnificent, magnetic, motivational and magical they are. If there was one message from all the moms we spoke to, it is: I am a mother and so much more. *I am (M)e.*



## (M) ove Your Body

When Sucheta Pal started her motherhood journey, she was unsure about the changes it would bring into her life. She observed that, on the one hand, some mothers stayed away from exercising altogether, while others returned to a pre-pregnancy body within a matter of weeks. This confused Sucheta about which path would be best for her.

Sucheta took it easy in her first trimester by taking gentle walks, lifting light weights, and practising Zumba. But Sucheta's doctor gave her the green signal to return to her exercise routine. "That's the day I launched my seven-city Zumba tour. As I travelled across the country, I was showing off my belly in my sports bra. It was amazing," she recalls.

Even though her family was extremely supportive, social media was not as accepting of her decision to exercise as a pregnant woman. "Society can make you feel like being pregnant requires complete bed rest. It's not true. When you're creating new life, it's important that you move the right way and offer the best nutrients, blood flow, and energy to the baby inside you," she says. By the time her third trimester rolled in, Sucheta had recognised the signs her body was showing her and decided to slow down until the baby was born.

Post-delivery, recovery proved to be harder than Sucheta had imagined. She began researching and discovered that the weakest point in her body was her core, which needed special attention. As she worked towards rebuilding her foundation, she felt inspired to help other mothers going through something similar. "I decided to take an international course to become a pre-and post-natal coach," she says.

Her online programme focuses on helping mothers heal. She is also working towards changing the regressive conversation around 'bouncing back' after pregnancy. "I proudly say that I still have belly fat," she confides, adding that chasing weight loss after delivery is unhealthy. Instead, she believes every mother should embrace her new body and focus on working on the new, stronger version of herself.

Nike Dri-FIT (M) Pullover,  
Nike Dri-FIT One (M) Leggings,  
Nike ZoomX Vaporfly Next% 2 sneakers

# I (M) Per fect

Aishwarya Krishnan danced throughout her pregnancy – quite literally. "I went into labour at 7:30 am on 14th January, and I had been dancing till 1:00 am," says the salsa teacher. As a first-time mother, she was excited to welcome a new addition to their family. Motherhood is often defined by its sacrifices, and she was worried that she might have to give up dancing when she began this journey. Her gynaecologist told her she would have to do no such thing. "If anything, I was encouraged to work on becoming stronger for the baby inside me," she says, while also paying attention to her sleep and diet during her prenatal months. "Pregnancy doesn't necessarily mean the end of your life as you know it," she adds.

Aishwarya had mentally prepared herself for the comments she would receive on the changing shape of her body. But to her surprise, her journey garnered a lot of love and support on social media, and young mothers started enrolling for her classes more than ever. Through it all, her husband remained her biggest cheerleader. "I started to enjoy looking chubby and proudly wore all my body-hugging clothes," she recalls.

The portrayal of a perfect postpartum body in mainstream media often sets unrealistic expectations and creates anxiety in new mothers who can't match up. Instead of measuring themselves in inches and going on a crash diet, Aishwarya's message for other mothers is to honour the body. "Thank it for everything it has done and is currently doing, and don't be in a rush. Motherhood is extremely rewarding, so enjoy all the gifts that it gives," she says.

Aishwarya admits that spending time with her child has helped her develop and maintain a positive relationship with her body. "Your child loves you despite your imperfections. Whether I lose or gain weight, manage to hold it all together or not, in the eyes of my child, I'm perfect. That's all that matters," she says.



Nike Dri-FIT Swoosh (M) Bra, Nike Dri-FIT One (M) Leggings



Nike Dri-FIT (M) Pullover, Nike Dri-FIT One (M) Leggings, Wmns Nike React Escape Run sneakers

# Fin ding Me (M) oments

Vandana Bala's motherhood journey during the lockdown was an isolating experience for a second-time mother. Even though she had been through this before, Vandana struggled with postpartum anxiety. "It was a reminder of the importance of giving yourself time to recover. After all, you can't fill another cup when your cup is empty," she says.

Young mothers are often riddled with 'mom-guilt', convinced that everything will fall apart if they are not constantly with their babies. For Vandana, letting go of this guilt was the first step in dealing with her anxiety. She had to learn to find time for herself. "Sometimes you don't get more than five minutes to yourself, especially with two kids under two. I would lock myself up in the bathroom with a cup of chai, have a solo dance party in my room, or simply count to ten," she recalls.

She was also keen on finding her way back to fitness, as physical activity had always helped her keep her mental health in check. But it wasn't easy to find the time to visit the gym or go for a run. "A turning point was when my husband gifted me a smart bike. I could finally work out with my kids present in the room," she says.

Once she had begun making time for fitness, another challenge was not to be discouraged by the lack of drastic results. As someone who used to complete 10k runs weekly before her pregnancy, it was not easy to accept her new body. "It took me a while to realise that I didn't need six-pack abs as I had before. I just wanted to become strong for my kids so they could watch me run and play football with them," she says.

For all the mothers who are way too harsh on themselves, Vandana advises trying to see themselves from the eyes of their child. "You are your baby's hero. All those stretch marks and c-section scars are just incredible reminders of the warrior you are," she says.



# The Manage it all (M)om

As a woman who wears many hats – social media manager, content creator and Zumba trainer, Anushka Mulchandani used to pride herself on her organisation skills. So, when she prepared to take on motherhood, she thought she could manage it all. "I want everything to run on a schedule. But a baby has no schedule," she laughs. Two months postpartum, she is still finding her feet in getting her professional life back on track. But it has not been easy.

The road to recovery varies for every mother. Because she suffered from sciatica, Anushka had to give up practising Zumba during her pregnancy. "It was frustrating not to be able to move the way I used to. I would go on regular walks, but I found it quite boring and missed moving to crazy, powerful music," she confesses. With the doctor's go-ahead finally in place, she is equally excited and nervous to return to dancing and teaching. "I used to take two Zumba classes every day. I haven't done that in a long time, so I think getting that stamina back will be a challenge," she says.

Anushka's advice to mothers getting back to fitness is to find active wear that makes them feel good about themselves. "I often wonder if those stretch marks and flabby bits will ever disappear and when I can dress the way I used to," she says, adding that if she wants to get there eventually, working out is the only way.

Between managing her work, practice, and her newborn's needs, Anushka has her hands full. Although she hasn't figured it all out, she is hopeful for the future. "Soon, I will be able to manage it all, or maybe not. For now, it is time to bond with my baby and accept that recovery will be slow, and that is okay," she says.



Nike Dri-FIT (M) Tank, Nike Dri-FIT One (M) Leggings

# Mind fully (M)e



As someone who likes to go with the flow, Chandini Subbaiah was delighted when she found out she was pregnant with her first child. But when you're used to operating at full speed, slowing down is not easy. "The first three months were challenging. My body was going through a big change, and I had no idea how anything I was doing would affect my little one," she says.

As a pre-and-post natal trainer and yoga instructor, she turned to her practice when things got difficult. "I was gaining weight in some places, a few of my body parts were getting darker...but by meditating and repeating positive affirmations, I was able to remind myself that this process is making me a better person," she recalls.

Instead of giving up exercising to 'rest and relax' – as some around her had suggested – she continued teaching her clients and working on herself. "When pregnant, your hormonal levels are so high that you don't know if you're sad, angry, or bored. Exercising helps you manage your moods by releasing happy hormones," she says. Moving, meditating and breathing made all the difference in her pregnancy journey. By using the breathing *pranayama* techniques in yoga, she

was able to uplift her mood, battle fatigue, and connect more deeply with her baby.

Finding the right workout clothes was another challenge. Before trying out the Nike (M) collection, she often felt stuffed in her maternity tights. "But the Nike (M) collection instantly felt like a second skin. As you grow, the fabric grows with you. I've gotten so comfortable in it that I wear it day and night, whether I'm working out or resting," she says.

As Chandini enters her final trimester, she admits to being more emotional and less mobile than before. She confesses, still trying to come to terms with this new version of herself. To find strength, both emotional and physical, she seeks a few solitary moments to breathe. "I recharge my batteries simply by breathing the right way," she says.

Her journey has taught her that pregnancy is not always as magical as it's made out to be. Sure, there are days when she is positive and brimming with energy. But some days, even getting out of bed feels like a task. And that's okay. "Sometimes, to find lost energy, the only way is to slow down, build strength and accept that motherhood is not a race," she says. ■

Nike Dri-FIT (M) Pullover, Nike Dri-FIT One (M) Shorts

Make-up **KRISANN FIGUEIREDO**  
 Hair **RAKSHANDA IRANI**  
 Fashion intern **NAHID NAWAAZ**