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Saturday, August 6, 2005 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

Exercise groups help women lose baby weight — with babies in tow

By **Stephanie Dunnewind**
Seattle Times staff reporter

Jennifer Hunt of Renton lost 10 pounds and gained several friends after starting a mom's exercise group in June.

The group, organized through [Meetup.com](#), gets together once or twice a week for a brisk 2-mile walk pushing strollers through an Eastside park, punctuated by stair running and strengthening exercises. Workouts end with a playdate on the park toys.

"I'm not a certified instructor or personal trainer; I'm just a person who wants to get her heart rate up," explained Hunt, a former runner and mom of 2 ½- and 1-year-old sons. "It was time for me to get back in shape and lose the baby weight."

She's one of a growing number of fitness-minded moms looking for a workout that lets them bond with their baby and other moms.

See Mommy Run, a free Web site that links moms in walking or running groups, expanded to Washington state this spring and now features 218 members in 28 groups here.

Two national stroller fitness programs, Baby Boot Camp and Stroller Strides, offer local classes; several fitness clubs lead mom-baby exercise or yoga classes. (See sidebar on C5.) Certified instructors teach organized classes, which tend to meet more consistently. But they often cost \$15 per class for drop-ins.

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[enlarge](#) LAURA MORTON / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Shannon Zondag, left, and Sylvie Doucy take part in a workout group for new mothers in Bellevue Downtown Park.

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A study in last September's Maternal and Child Health Journal found moms who maintained or improved their activity level after having a baby reported being better off than women who didn't exercise or dropped in their fitness level. And for more proof, a British study published last year concluded moms in a stroller-walking group were more fit and less likely to be depressed than those in a regular support group.



More information

Exercise books: "Walking Through Pregnancy and Beyond," Mark and Lisa Fenton (Lyons Press, 2004); "Buff Moms: The Complete Guide to Fitness for All Mothers," Sue Fleming (Villard, 2004); "Get Your Body Back: Lose Weight, Gain Energy, and Get Fit After Having Your Baby," Anita Weil Bell (St. Martin's Press, 2002); "The StrollerFit ExerBook," Lisa Kvietok (Jasperoo Publishing, 2001); "Exercise After Pregnancy: How to Look and Feel Your Best," Helene Byrne (Celestial Arts, 2001).

No wonder: Moms get to chat and break a sweat, babies get an outing and child-care isn't required.

"I was feeling isolated and wanting to get some exercise," said Rosina Geary, of West Seattle, a stay-at-home mom with a 2-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son. "The gym isn't very social since everyone has headphones on or the music is blaring. I knew there had to be a way to solve both issues."

She posted a note on Craig's List and also joined See Mommy Run to promote the Alki Striders with Strollers, which meets three days a week to walk along Alki Beach for an hour. They stop three or four times to do upper-body exercises with stretch bands (or babies, for biceps curls).

Moms like free, casual gatherings that work around the rhythms of their sometimes fickle little people.

At a recent Bellevue/Eastside Moms Exercise Group outing at Bellevue's Downtown Park, one mom arrived halfway through after her baby's nap; another rejoined the group after stopping to feed her baby.

Circling the park's half-mile loop three times, the group of six paused to line up strollers so babies could watch as moms ran up and down stairs, did triceps exercises on park benches and jogged around trees.

Baby drop a bottle? No worries. Not quite ready for skin-tight spandex? Come in shorts and a T-shirt.

"These are all people who just had babies," said Shannon Zondag, of Bellevue. "We're all probably about in the same shape."

When Hunt is up with her baby in the middle of the night, it's hard to get up motivated the next morning. "Do I work out or go take a nap?" she laughed. "Having a partner, even if it's just one other person, helps you get out, even if you don't want to."

That's true for Zondag. "If I don't come to this, I don't exercise at all,"

admitted the mom of Robbie, 8 months. "I have the best of intentions, but I always find something else to do or some excuse not to exercise. But if I promise people I'll be here, I'll show up.

"It's always hard coming, but afterwards you feel so good."

Most of the moms in the Eastside exercise club are relatively new to the Seattle area, Hunt said. Some are stay-at-home moms; others work part-time or from home.

"When you become a new mom, you don't always know how to reach out and meet other moms. And you're not guaranteed to have anything in common," said Andrea Vincent, who started See Mommy Run to connect with a few moms in northern Virginia, outside Washington, D.C. It now boasts 5,300 members nationwide.

"If you join or start a running group in your neighborhood, you know people live nearby and at least have fitness in common," said Vincent, who has a 1-year-old daughter.

Some women in Amy Van Valkenburg's new Eastside Jogging Mommas group want to train for a half-marathon or triathlon. "It's easy to get frustrated when you're not at the same fitness level you were before," said the Redmond resident, who jogs four to nine miles with her 13-month-old daughter in a stroller. "But if you stick with it, you can be the same or even better than you were before the pregnancy."

"I used to be active and in shape," huffed Angela Tepper, of Kirkland, as she pushed Jaden, 5 months, in his stroller at the Downtown Park. "But even this kicked my butt the first time I came. I think everyone's goal is to fit back in their jeans."

It's easier to exercise when babies like hanging out in the stroller, checking the sights.

"My daughter is just used to that being part of her day," said Vincent, who typically runs for 45 minutes to an hour five days a week with different groups. "Sometimes the older ones will chant, 'Go, Mommy, go!'"

With kids contained, "I do my best thinking when I'm exercising," Hunt said. "It's definitely Mom time."

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