

Health | December 28, 2016 | By Korin Miller

## Tess Holliday Struggles With Postpartum Body Image, Like Anyone Else

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Unfortunately, this is all too common.



Model Tess Holliday has earned an army of fans on social media thanks to her fun photos and constant body-positive messaging. But like basically everyone, the 31-year-old isn't immune from body-image struggles—in particular, she says she's feeling unsure of herself in the wake of giving birth to her son, Bowie.

“Each day feels like a battle to learn how to love my body postpartum,” she wrote on Instagram, alongside two photos of herself in lingerie. “It's been 6 months, & my stomach is lower, my breasts are a different shape, new stretch marks & I feel like a stranger in my body more than ever.”

Holliday says she “wasn't anticipating this at all,” adding, “I'm not used to looking in the mirror & feeling like I don't recognize myself, but sadly that's my reality some days.” The model says she debated about whether to upload the post, but she ultimately decided that it's important to be honest with her fans about the pressure that's put on new moms to lose weight after having a baby.

“I was fat before, I carried a healthy baby, & guess what, still fat... & THAT'S OKAY,” Holliday says. “I have no New Year's resolution to lose weight, but only to work on learning my new body & loving & nurturing it.”

Holliday says her partner Nick tells her that she's beautiful every day, but it's really on her to lift herself up. “So that's what I will do, take it day by day,” she writes. “It's a journey, not a race... & a beautiful one at that.”



tessholliday • 5 days ago



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Each day feels like a battle to learn how to love my body postpartum. It's been 6 months, & my stomach is lower, my breasts are a different shape, new stretch marks & I feel like a stranger in my body more than ever. I wasn't anticipating this at all. I'm not used to looking in the mirror & feeling like I don't recognize myself, but sadly that's my reality some days. I debated on whether or not to post this, but I think it's important to be honest about what it's like to be a woman in the media, who recently had a baby & the pressure that's put on new moms to "lose the baby weight". I was fat before, I carried a healthy baby, & guess what, still fat... & THATS OKAY. I have no New Years resolution to lose weight, but only to work on learning my new body & loving & nurturing it. Not a day goes by that Nick doesn't tell me how beautiful I am, but it's not our partners job to lift our spirits, we have to be our own cheerleaders. So that's what I will do, take it day by day. It's a journey, not a race.. & a beautiful one at that. #6monthspostpartum #effyourbeautystandards @effyourbeautystandards

66.1k likes 1,888 comments

Instagram

Unfortunately, Holliday's struggle isn't uncommon for new moms. "Most women are very aware of their body changes in the postpartum period," Maureen Whelihan, M.D., an ob/gyn at the Center for Sexual Health & Education, tells SELF. Whelihan points out that someone can often still look pregnant for weeks after giving birth and may even hear questions from well-meaning strangers about when they're due—which don't exactly help with body image when a person's body is drastically different from normal.

Jessica Shepherd, M.D., an assistant professor of clinical obstetrics and gynecology and director of Minimally Invasive Gynecology at The University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago, tells SELF that it's important for people to realize that their bodies will change during pregnancy and embrace that fact. "Pregnancy is pregnancy, and everyone's body has hormonal and physiologic changes," she says.

A person's body can take a lot of time to get back to its pre-baby state, Whelihan says, and the rate of recovery varies depending on the body part you're talking about.

Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF that stretch marks are a common side effect of pregnancy. "Most women develop some stretch marks from pregnancy," he says. "These can occur anywhere there's weight gain—and the most common locations are abdomen, thighs, breasts, and buttocks." Over time, stretch marks may decrease in appearance, he says, but they don't usually go away.

People also tend to lose hair after they give birth, and it can take up to a year for new hair to grow back, Whelihan says. Breasts are also often impacted as well, with the areolae and nipples darkening from their previous colors. Breasts can regularly swell up as well as develop a slightly lower appearance, Whelihan says.

Abdominal muscles sag initially, Whelihan says, but they can go back to a near-normal state over time and by following a healthy diet, which can be easier said than done. "Too often, the exhausted new mom turns to excess carbohydrate intake," which can lead to weight gain or a harder time losing weight, Whelihan says. Eating well, while also having enough calories for energy and breastfeeding, provided a person is nursing, can help speed things along, she says.

While many changes take place in a person's body during and after pregnancy, Shepherd stresses that it's important to view them as having a role in carrying a baby. "They shouldn't be looked at as something negative," she says.

Whelihan agrees. "These changes are necessary and common for a successful pregnancy," she says. If you enter into pregnancy at a healthy fitness level for you, try to stay healthy throughout your pregnancy, and eat well and exercise once you feel ready, getting used to your postpartum body will likely be easier, especially if you try to be patient.

That's key, says Shepherd. "Women should give themselves about a year to really get back to where they were physiologically, psychologically, mentally, and emotionally," she says.