

# EXTRA MEASURES

Sometimes your vacation from fitness was anything but a trip. Whether you've been sidelined by a strain, a scalpel, or a screaming "precious," here's what you should know about specific fitness breaks

**▶ COMING BACK FROM AN INJURY** Severe ankle sprains, for example, can take 6 weeks or more to heal. But if there's only minimal swelling, and you're able to walk normally on the ankle, chances are it's mild and you'll be able to resume activity within a few days, says athletic trainer Mary Mundrane-Zweiacher. To loosen and strengthen an ankle that's been on the outs, trace the alphabet in the air with your toes. Next, place a towel on a wood or tile floor and scrunch it with your toes. For a fracture, you may be out 6 to 8 weeks and need up to a month more of rehab.

**▶ COMING BACK FROM SURGERY** If you've had an appendectomy, a hysterectomy, or anything else that's muddled your midsection, heed your doc's advice and sit tight for the allotted time (usually around 6 weeks). "If you have abdominal surgery, you're out for the count, because anything you do, even walking with vigor, can put pressure on the abdomen," says Pamela Peeke, M.D., a nationally recognized fitness expert. Take it easy when you return to activity, and do gentle exercise like hatha yoga for the first few weeks. "But avoid ashtanga or vinyasa styles, which are too aggressive for your weakened state."

**▶ COMING BACK FROM DELIVERY** Pooches are cute—when they're on a leash. Even the most seasoned athletes with six-packs can get postpartum pooches, because a growing uterus can cause a diastasis, which is a separation of the abdominal

muscles. "Some 98 percent of women who've had a child have a diastasis, and it can take up to 6 months for it to heal," says Julie Tupler, R.N., author of *Lose Your Mummy Tummy*. "Doing crunches postpregnancy can actually make it worse, because you end up putting pressure on the wrong places." Try the seated Tupler technique: Sit in a chair and contract your transverse abdominus muscle by drawing your belly button toward your spine. Hold for a moment and then release. Work up to 100 reps, five times a day. It can take about 6 weeks to get your prebaby fitness level back, but up to 6 months on average to return your abs and pelvic floor to normal. "Plus, your bigger breasts have pulled your shoulders forward, which can create back pain," Tupler says. Do three sets of 10 seated or bent-over rows three times a week to strengthen your upper back and unhunch your shoulders.

