



PUSH IT TO THE LIMIT

A group of 'pushy mums' meets regularly in Queen's Park to exercise, boost their self-esteem and return their figures to post-baby fitness. They're easy to spot but hard to keep up with, as Lucy Land discovers

It's Friday lunchtime in Queen's Park and I'm trying to keep up with a small brigade of women who are marching in pairs around the perimeter of the park – with their buggies. These are the Pushy Mums – a fitness class for mums or mums-to-be who use their buggies as part of their workout.

I'm trying to get some photographs, but the chance of catching a snapshot of the mums in action is becoming slimmer by the second. Veering off to the left to catch the women heading towards the bend, I'm already regretting the decision to come off the path. Looking through the camera viewfinder, the women appear as dots in the distance and my hand shakes as I slip in the mud. Eventually the women come to a halt and I catch up with them (my suede boots pretty much ruined) being taken through their stretches and lunges by personal trainer and Pilates teacher, Karen Appleson. For her exercise classes you need two things (besides the baby): suitable clothing and a buggy. I have neither, hence the mud-sliding spectacle.

Karen is a member of the Guild of Pregnancy and Postnatal Exercise Instructors and the Queen's Park Pushy Mums group is part of a wider network set up by post-natal fitness experts Judy Defiore and Rachel Berg. The classes help new mothers regain their figures and self-esteem. Trainers and a sports bra provide vital support; a buggy supplies the ideal resistance tool to tone muscles.

'The fresh air sends the babies to sleep while the mums get to talk to each other and get a work out – and they are desperate for it,' says Karen, whose own son Zan, is now 18 months old. 'When you have a baby, you sometimes feel like you're the only one going through these changes. The post-natal period is very much a time of rehabilitation, with the aim of getting back to where you were before the pregnancy.'

Karen continually emphasises the importance of safety. Throughout the workout, she often tells the women to stop if they feel pain; she'll make sure every mum is doing the exercise correctly; and that her exercises do not include high-impact running. 'I'm spot-on with technique. It's really important to build core strength: to strengthen the body from the inside out and to keep new mums safe. If the technique isn't correct, the exercise will not only be inefficient but it could also cause more harm than good.' Karen's high standards are maintained by the small class size, which also means that even though she has only been running the class in the area for a few months, there is already a waiting list.

I catch up with a few of the mums over a well-deserved hot chocolate in Queen's Park cafe. 'Is there anything you don't like about exercising outdoors in all weather?' I ask. 'The only downside is that when you get home the baby wakes up,' Claire Mitchell, mum to four-month-old Ruby, laughs.

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