

Celebrating Motherhood in Sport

Sep 30, 2021 | Sandra Michalska

Since the start of the modern Olympics, [much progress towards gender equality has been](#) made. However, there are still [gender disparities, especially for mothers in sport](#), that need more visibility. In a world with social media, female athletes are closing this gap with direct-to-fan engagement, more control of their personal brand and more opportunities to be candid about motherhood—which is [too often judged as incompatible with professional sport](#). A few years ago, [Serena Williams used Instagram to speak up about postpartum depression](#). More recently, French basketball player [Valériane Ayayi Vukosavljevic](#) revealed she was three-and-a-half months pregnant during the Olympic tournament. She went on to win the bronze medal with her team.

These stories have social impact and reflect women's increased expectations for authentic communication that fully reflects their lifestyles, which our Visual GPS research found that [7 in 10 women globally](#) now have. From postpartum pressure to breastfeeding or exercising while being pregnant, some brands are following suit with [more realistic representations of motherhood](#). Still, between [the myth of a perfect](#) mom and [the guilt from taking time to exercise](#), it's important to see a wider range of empowering and real motherhood stories.

Pregnancy: Ways to be active

At Getty Images, our data reveals that of all the images customers chose to show women exercising while pregnant, there is a very small representation of physical activities that go beyond yoga in perfectly spotless, uncluttered and minimalistic interiors. While yoga itself is without any doubt a beneficial activity for mental and physical health for pregnant women, expanding the scope of visual expression with more variety when it comes to home settings, activities and who gets to be represented adds up to more accessibility, diversity and genuine inclusion. Brisk walking, swimming, cycling, dancing—[all these activities are considered safe](#) for most pregnant women, yet most popular imagery used by brands overlooks this richness in visual scenarios. By showing women across different activities in a positive light, images can increase participation and women's health. As for brands, it means going beyond visual clichés and differentiating their storytelling from the rest.

Postpartum: Unfiltered

The latest data gathered for [Visual GPS](#) confirms that globally, women are more likely to experience bias in relation to body shape, type or size, and this sentiment is even stronger among younger females. In a world where our understandings of postpartum bodies are strongly pressured by before/after body

transformations seen in social media, inclusive visual representation has the power to counter postpartum pressure. At Getty Images, [we are committed to showing the reality of the postpartum journey](#), with a whole range of different body types, with or without the stretch marks. By showcasing the endless possibilities and types of women's bodies, advertisers can challenge social stigmas and build women's confidence to stay active. Furthermore, imagery which shows positive, emotional rewards from pregnancy and postpartum activities such as connecting with other moms in sports classes or connecting with nature by running with a buggy in the park will resonate with female audiences and encourage participation.

Motherhood: The next generation of sportswomen

Staying active is not only important for women's health, it also has a huge influence on the health of the next generation. Encouraging children to play sports at a young age by leading by example is vital to creating a healthier and more active society. While we know that [the pandemic has put pressure on women to do even more domestic tasks](#), it also added another layer to the changing visual landscape by redefining women's priorities: [9 in 10 women now think it is equally important to take care of themselves emotionally as well as physically](#). Furthermore, in addition to developing daily wellness and exercise routines, 9 in 10 women globally look to celebrate good things in life. And since motherhood is a life journey, brands have the opportunity to broaden motherhood stories and include scenarios depicting the bonding power of sport between mothers and children of every age. Showcasing moms of all ages, races, abilities and body types will speak truths about motherhood to an even wider target group.