

Shape up M&S, your knickers are pants

AS I stood with my back to the bedroom mirror, twisting my neck to catch my reflection, I shuddered in horror at the pair of saddlebags that seemed to have replaced my reasonably-toned behind.

While I haven't quite graduated with full honours from the Kylie school for tight bums, after months of doing bottom-clenching exercises – at my desk, in the car, while cooking dinner – I expected more than a hammock hanging from my buttocks.

And then it hit me. There wasn't a problem with my body. There was a problem with my lingerie. The badly fitting briefs (a size 10, if the pack was to be trusted) were about as shapely as a dish cloth.

I know the old adage about workmen blaming their tools, but this working woman is pointing the finger fairly and squarely at M&S. The shop that used to be the only place on the High Street to buy one's knickers has lost its way. The briefs in its once-fabled lingerie department are now badly cut, poorly designed and made from cheap fabric.

When once its knickers would cradle my bottom in a cap of comfortable cotton, now there's little to distinguish them from the synthetic packs of underwear at my local Tesco.

Of course, I don't expect to get the full lingerie-buying experience when I sling



pants in the trolley along with a family pack of King Edwards and a multi-pack of kitchen roll. I do when I buy them in the dedicated lingerie department of what was once perceived to be Britain's most trusted purveyor of pants.

ONCE M&S was the only place to get lovely, pretty knickers without going for the so-called 'sexy' look (read: red and itchy) of High Street underwear shops like Ann Summers, or the eye-watering prices of bespoke lingerie boutiques.

Indeed, such is the loyalty M&S knickers inspire, when a friend of mine moved to Israel many years ago, she would always ask me to buy some of their white knickers to bring out whenever I came to visit.

As well as betraying their devoted customers by churning out ill-fitting briefs, the store has abandoned its once-wholesome approach to lingerie by launching a succession of tacky styles – the kind of thing you once would find in the supermarket satin range just before Valentine's Day.

Take their newly unveiled Jubilee collection. The design team supposedly revisited the fashions of the monarch's Coronation year, blending conical bras with a modern day makeover in silk, satin, lace and mesh.

The result? A trashy dog's dinner that wouldn't look out of place on a chat-line advert. Since when did M&S's designs on our derrieres sink so low? Even girls on a drunken hen-night would balk at this lot. The only thing regal about the collection is the fact that some of those French knickers could double up as a gazebo for a street party.

Marks & Spencer needs to return to its roots: fitted, well-made cotton knickers that cling and flatter, and provide comfort in the right places. Otherwise, I'm taking my hard-working bottom elsewhere.

ANGELA EPSTEIN

BARELY a week goes by without yet another celebrity flaunting her enviable bikini body just weeks after having a baby. But few real women manage to snap back into shape so soon after childbirth. Femail asked six brave mothers to reveal the toll pregnancy has taken on their figures.

HUGE STRETCH MARKS

NATALIE EDMONDS, 26, is a holistic therapist from Weston-super-Mare, Somerset. She has an 18-month-old son, Elliott. She weighs 12st 3lb and is a size 14. She says her stretch marks were the worst her midwife had ever seen.

IT WAS inevitable I'd get stretch marks. My mother had them when she was expecting me and I'd already developed them as my hips widened during puberty.

For the first three months of my pregnancy, I was so ill I threw up everything. But as the sickness went and I grew more tired I started comfort-eating sausage sandwiches and chocolate. The weight went on my thighs, breasts, face and, of course, stomach.

I noticed my first stretch mark at four months and after that a new one emerged virtually every week.

I told myself it didn't matter as long as they remained below my belly button, so I could hide them under trousers and skirts. But Elliott was three weeks overdue and as my bump grew bigger, they crept towards my chest.

Even my midwife at Southmead Hospital in Bristol was shocked. She said they were the worst stretch marks she'd ever seen. I was angered by her rudeness but exasperated with my body nonetheless.

I lost the three stone I'd put on within just three weeks of Elliott's birth in November 2010. I lost my appetite and was shocked by how quickly my weight plummeted.

My stomach had completely lost muscle definition. The sudden weight loss even gave me stretch marks on my breasts and arms.

I'm still breastfeeding, so my body hasn't completely settled. Aside from a few spinning classes, I don't have the motivation to exercise. Being a mum takes up all my energy.

After having me, my mother, who's a size 8, spent decades dieting. She tells me I should do the same. But I don't want to compete with her. She says my stretch marks are horrible, but I think they're a mark of what I've been through.

It might sound strange but I'm disappointed they've faded to silver and are less visible. I felt like a tiger mum when they were bright red.

I split up with my partner Clemence, 39, a psychiatric nurse, shortly after I fell pregnant. It's not on my agenda to meet anyone else. I am generally happy with my body although I know my stomach will never look the same again.

SAGGY BUST

AIMEE MARSHALL, 22, is a hairdresser from Braintree, Essex. She has a nine-month-old daughter, Eadie. She weighs 9st and is a size 8-10. Aimee was devastated by the way her breasts looked after giving birth.

PRE-PREGNANCY, I was a size 6 with pert 32E breasts. I was so proud of them. I showed them off in low-cut tops and was full of confidence.

I'd only been with my boyfriend for eight weeks and was on the Pill when I found out I was expecting. I was shocked but soon grew excited. I only put on a stone and my bump didn't become obvious until I was six months pregnant.

That's not to say I didn't look like a wreck. The beautiful blooming pregnancy body is a myth. Because of the hormones, I developed strange moles and psoriasis that spread down my forehead and cheeks.

Eadie was born by emergency C-section four weeks prematurely last August at Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford. I had a condition called placenta abruptio, in which my placenta developed a hole and Eadie's heartbeat slowed.

She was rushed to the neo-natal unit and the midwives encouraged me to express milk for her. I ended

by *Antonia Hoyle*

up with excruciating mastitis. Both breasts tripled in size and developed a greenish hue.

They were so painful and lumpy I couldn't sleep. I'd watch in floods of tears as the other new mums breastfed their babies. We left hospital five days later and I was given antibiotics. My breasts went back to a G-cup then six weeks later, when I stopped feeding Eadie, they started to shrink.

Although my bra size only went down to an F cup, the skin had stretched so much they looked like empty sacks – I was devastated.

It took three months for my stomach to go down and I am still self-conscious about the red C-section scar. I haven't lost the stone I put on but the only thing that really bothers me is my cleavage. It feels as if I've lost part of my identity.

I went to see a surgeon last month about having my breasts lifted and implants inserted and I'm saving up for the £5,600 cost.

It has affected my confidence. Eadie's dad and I split up when I was six months pregnant and I'm too embarrassed to even contemplate another physical relationship.

I haven't been put off having more children but wish I'd been aware of the havoc it would cause my body. Mums-to-be should know that they will never look the same again.

LOST 2 STONE

JESSICA ARMSTRONG, 20, is a singer from Sheffield. She has a three-month-old daughter, Nevaya. She weighs 11st 7lb and is a size 12. She lost two stone during her pregnancy.

BEFORE I became a mother, I had lumps and bumps on my hips, stomach and bottom. I weighed 13st 7lb and was a size 16, but for many years I wasn't bothered enough by my size to sacrifice my beloved takeaways.

Then, exactly three days after I'd actually resolved to do something about my weight and started the Dukan diet, I discovered I was pregnant. I'd been with my partner for three years and we were delighted.

Suddenly, my desire for junk food disappeared. The only foods I craved were ones it wasn't safe to eat because of the increased risk of food poisoning – prawns and smoked salmon were what I wanted most, but obviously I couldn't eat them. So, after the first trimester I'd lost a stone.

My appetite never returned and I lost two stone in total. It was so different to how I'd anticipated pregnancy would be that I kept going back to my GP. But they told me it was no cause for concern.

Immediately after Nevaya was born this February at Chesterfield Hospital, Derbyshire, I was a size



Natalie loves her stretch marks

Aimee hates her saggy bust

What PRE DID TO

14 and could see my collarbone for the first time. After two weeks, I shrunk to a size 12 and had to buy a whole new wardrobe.

The change in my body was quite disconcerting. My breasts swelled from a D to an E cup as I breastfed and for the first time in my life, I was slim with a large cleavage. I'm making a conscious effort to eat healthily so Nevaya receives the right nutrients, so it's perhaps not surprising that I've kept the weight off.

I know I'm lucky. But it's still been a bit of a shock to change shape so dramatically.

BIG THIGHS AND CELLULITE

NATALIA RUSSELL, 37, is a receptionist from Tunbridge Wells, Kent. She has a 15-month-old son, Rian, is a size 12-14 and weighs 8st 7lb. Her legs have got bigger and she's developed cellulite.

LOOKING back at my body pre-pregnancy I think I was too thin, but my legs were much better than they are today. I weighed 8st, was a size 8 and went to the gym twice a week.

Both myself and my partner



Jessica's
slimmer
than
before

Natalia
hides her
wobbly
thighs

Rachel
loathes
her jelly
belly

Aoife
hasn't
changed
a bit

GNANNCY

OUR BODIES

Mark, 29, a financial supervisor, were thrilled when I fell pregnant, even though I was sick every morning for the first trimester.

I put on two-and-a-half stone with most of the weight going on my bottom and my legs. I accepted it as a part of being pregnant.

Rian was born last February at Pembury Hospital in Tunbridge Wells. I didn't feel the immediate bond I'd hoped for and for a few days afterwards I couldn't stop crying. My stomach looked like jelly.

As it started to go down, my legs looked bigger in comparison. But I vowed to enjoy spending time with Rian rather than put pressure on

myself to go to the gym and lose weight. Being tired makes me eat more, as did breastfeeding. My appetite is bigger than it was pre-pregnancy. I need the energy to look after Rian and I think my stomach has probably stretched and got used to needing more food.

I've also developed cellulite. I bought a skin brush and expensive creams, but they haven't made any difference.

In the end it was six months before I was back in size 12 jeans. I'm still 7lb heavier than I was, but don't think I need to lose any more weight. I'd love my legs to be more toned. They are bigger and wobblier. But I don't have time to go to the gym.

My tummy is also wobbly, whereas

before it was naturally flat. If I'm not too exhausted, I do 30 sit-ups before I go to bed. I wear trousers more than skirts these days to cover my legs.

There's not much opportunity for looking glamorous, but I'm proud of my body. As Mark says if I'm feeling low, my body may be bigger than it used to be, but it's given us our son.

WOBBLY TUMMY

RACHEL BARKER, 30, is a full-time mum from Colchester, Essex. She has three children, Kayden, five, Mason, three and Deacon, one. Rachel weighs 10st and is size 12-14. She says three births, including two C-sections, have

taken their toll on her stomach.

I'VE lost a lot of confidence in the way I look since became a mother. It didn't happen straight away. After Kayden was born in June 2006, I ended up a stone heavier. But during my second pregnancy, I craved cakes and biscuits and put on two stone. I loved the excuse pregnancy gave me not to worry about my weight.

When I went into labour with Mason he was in breech position so I had to have an elective Caesarean section. I was upset as I'd wanted another natural birth.

Afterwards, I was confined to bed for four days. I was shocked by the four-inch scar just below the top of

my knicker line. I'd given birth to Kayden and Mason in a hospital in Alicante, Spain, as my husband Kevin, who is an engineer, and I were living there at the time.

I'm not convinced the surgeon did a good job. The skin around the scar was purple and bruised. It was painful to shower. I couldn't pick up my children for the first week and couldn't do much else for several weeks after that. My immobility made it harder to lose weight.

Even after a year, I struggled to lose the final half stone and get back into my size 12 jeans. I couldn't bring myself to throw them out, so they stayed at the back of my wardrobe, upsetting me.

My third pregnancy was even harder. I craved crisps as well as sweet food. I still only put on two stone, but felt bigger, as if the cumulative effect of three pregnancies had taken their toll on my body.

Five months in, I discovered I had a complication called anti-E, which meant antibodies in my blood were attacking that of my unborn child. It increased the risks of a natural birth, so I had to have another C-section.

We'd moved back to Britain in December 2009 and Deacon was born in Southend Hospital in Essex last May. This time the incision — made in the same place — was neater and less painful.

But my scar is still red and I've got a massive flabby tummy. The tops of my legs are fatter and my bottom is bigger.

The only body parts I am happy with are my 32D breasts. One of the reasons I chose not to breastfeed was because I believed it would help them remain in reasonably good shape.

I'm a stone heavier than I was before I became a mum. I feel more womanly because of what my body has done, but less attractive.

Kevin says I'm still beautiful but it has affected our marriage — I always wear pyjamas in bed. I've accepted I'm going to remain this size and I'm learning to live with it.

HARDLY ANY CHANGE

AOIFE JOHNS, 27, is a stay-at-home mum from Harrow, London. Her son Cian is 22 months old. She weighs 8st 9lb and is a size 8-10. She thought the changes to her body after childbirth would be far worse than they were.

I WAS pleasantly surprised by my post-pregnancy body. I've never liked my wobbly tummy and worried that after I gave birth the skin on my stomach would hang down round my ankles, but although it is a bit loose it doesn't bother me.

I carried on with my normal diet and excitedly awaited my bump. I used to stand in front of the mirror pushing my tummy out and willing it to happen.

Out of fear of something going wrong, my boyfriend of four years, Ted, 27, a builder, and I didn't tell anyone we were having a baby until I was six months pregnant. I hid under baggy clothes and nobody noticed.

I put on two stone in total. Cian was born in Northwick Park Hospital in July 2010. Shortly after he arrived, I had a shower and looked in the hospital mirror. I was shocked by my wrinkly stomach but I'd expected to look far worse.

After labour, I developed sciatica, caused by a trapped nerve. It was more painful than the labour itself. I could barely pick Cian up and felt really down. My doctor told me I had post-natal depression at my six-week check-up but I think I was just overwhelmed. Ted was endlessly supportive.

Being fit enough to go for walks with Cian after eight weeks was a huge boost but I didn't get back to my pre-pregnancy weight until he was six months.

I realised I'd done it as I managed to pull on a favourite red dress for Cian's Christening. It was a brilliant feeling and all the better knowing I'd done it by just eating sensibly.

I do yoga once a week, walk three miles every other day and have just joined a jogging club.

I don't have much muscle tone and I'm not going to be flashing much flesh in the near future. But all in all, I don't think I look much different.

Pictures: NICK HOLT, Clothes: CHANTELE, FIGLEAVES AND CHARNOS.