

Physiotherapy Outpatient Department

Patient Information



The Information Standard

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Information

If you need this information in large print, easy read, on audiotape or in another language please call 0800 7838058 or e-mail pals@dchft.nhs.uk

If you wish to obtain a list of the sources used to develop this information leaflet please call 0800 7838058 or e-mail patient.info@dchft.nhs.uk

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Post Natal Exercises

Looking after a new baby can be exhausting. It is therefore important to look after yourself too. Remember to have a short regular rest during the day, for the first few weeks after delivery and eat a healthy diet. Research also shows that returning to fitness will help you feel better and have more energy.

The following information offers advice on safe exercises that will help in your recovery after normal delivery and caesarean section.

Pelvic floor muscles

These muscles are positioned at the base of the pelvis. They support your internal organs, and are also important in controlling your bladder and bowel.

The pelvic floor muscles can weaken during pregnancy due to the weight of the baby and they are also stretched during delivery. It is important to exercise these muscles regularly to prevent unwanted leakage of urine when you cough, sneeze or exercise ('Stress Incontinence').

To exercise the pelvic floor:

1. For endurance
 - Sit comfortably on a chair with both feet flat on the floor
 - Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and the flow of urine at the same time. It feels like a 'squeeze and lift'
 - Do not tighten your buttocks or hold your breath when doing this exercise
 - Try and hold the lift for up to ten seconds
 - Relax
2. You will also need to practice exercising the pelvic floor quickly
 - Squeeze and lift, then relax. Remember to tighten these muscles before a cough / sneeze or before lifting.

Repeat both of these sets of exercises, up to five times at a session and do them up to five times daily now and forever!

Do not practice these exercises when emptying your bladder. Stopping mid-flow can be used as a very occasional test, but **never** first thing in the morning.

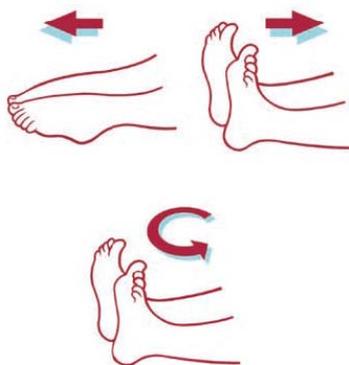
Pelvic floor muscles help to prevent leakage when older, and will also help to tighten your vagina, increasing sensation during sexual intercourse.

Pelvic floor exercises must be carried out daily for the rest of your life.

The following circulation and abdominal exercises should be done hourly for the first 3 days after the birth of your baby:

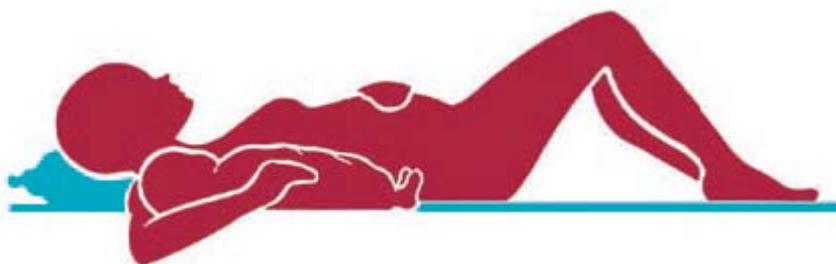
Circulation

3. Lying or sitting on the bed with your legs straight out and your feet about 30 cm apart:
 - Bend and stretch your ankles
 - Circle your feet in each direction
 - Bend and straighten your knees
 - Brace your knees back on to the bed and pull your feet up at the ankles. Hold this position for up to the count of 3
 - Do each of these exercises up to 10 times at a session and do 3 to 4 sessions each day



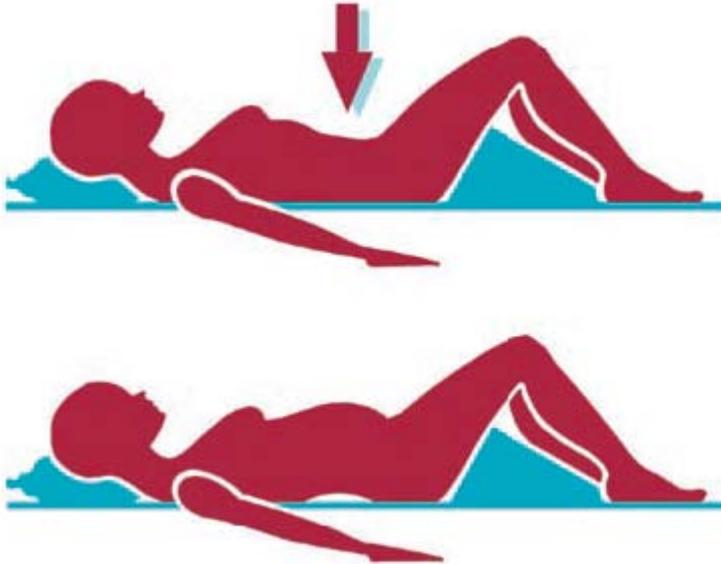
Abdominal hollowing

4. Lie on the bed with your knees bent and your feet flat:
 - Take a deep breath
 - As you breathe out draw your stomach in and hold for the count of 4, then relax
 - Repeat this up to 10 times at a session and 3-4 sessions a day



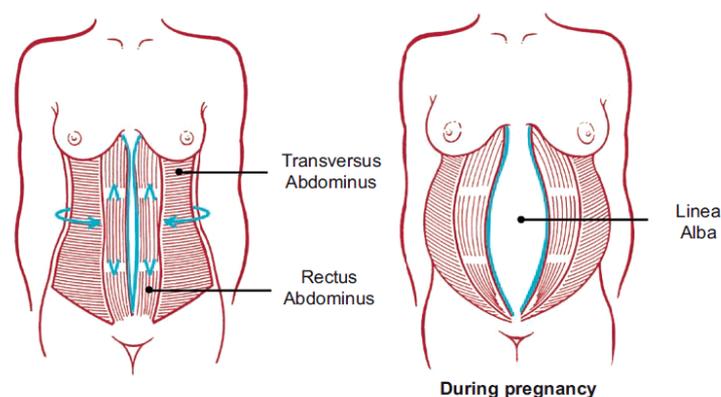
5. Lie on your back with pillows under your head, with your knees bent and feet flat.

- Pull in your stomach muscles, tighten your buttocks and press the small of your back on to the bed
- Your pelvis should be tilting up and backwards
- Repeat this up to 10 times at a session and do 3-4 sessions a day



Before progressing with further stomach exercises it is important to make sure that your abdominal muscles have returned to their pre-pregnancy position (although they will still be baggy and weak).

Your abdominal pregnancy these muscles (tummy) muscles act like a corset to protect your back when moving. Sometimes during 'gape' open to allow room for the baby as it grows. This is more likely to happen if you have had a large baby, a twin pregnancy, excess fluid around the baby or you have had several pregnancies.



In most cases, the gap closes a few days after birth; in this case continue with exercises 6-8 on the next page.

However, occasionally this gap persists after the baby is born which may lead to back pain.

This may be identified by your midwife during your routine post natal check. She will then refer you to physiotherapy where you will be taught specific exercises to help reduce the gap. In this case just continue with exercises 1-4 until directed by the physiotherapist.

Some women may become aware of a gap themselves: when getting in/out of the bed or in/out of the bath or doing exercises 6-8 a doming or bulging of the abdominal muscles may be seen or felt. If you notice this dome or bulge when attempting these exercises, it could be an indication that your muscles have not quite come back together again and you need to contact the midwife or GP who will refer you to physiotherapy.

Head lifts

(Do not do this exercise if you have neck pain)

6. Lie on your back with pillows under your head, your knees bent and feet flat.
 - Tilt your pelvis as described in exercise 5 of abdominal exercises, and pull up the pelvic floor
 - As you breathe out, lift your head and shoulders off the pillow and stretch your hands along your thighs to touch your knees
 - Hold this position to the count of 5 and then lower slowly
 - Repeat this 5 times at a session to start with, increasing to 10 times at a session over the next few weeks, and practice 3 sessions a day



Knee bends

7. Lie on your back with pillows under your head, your knees bent and feet flat.
 - Gently bend your right knee up towards your tummy and lower again until your foot is flat on the bed or floor
 - Repeat with opposite leg
 - Repeat with alternate legs 5 times each, 3 times a day

Knee roll

8. Lie on your back with pillows under your head, your knees bent and feet flat.
 - Keeping your knees together let them gently drop sideways to the right as far as is comfortable
 - Repeat in the opposite direction
 - Do these exercises 3 times each side, 3 times a day

After Caesarean Section

- Avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby. Ideally, encourage toddlers to climb up on to your lap for a cuddle rather than bending down to lift them
- Avoid any activity that may place extra strain on your abdomen such as vacuuming, or lifting heavy shopping
- Support your wound by 'hugging' your stomach when coughing or sneezing

It is recommended that you do not drive for 4-6 weeks after caesarean delivery in order to allow the abdominal muscles to heal. Check with your insurance company that they are happy for you to resume driving. Before you turn on the ignition for the first time after your caesarean section, check that you can:

- Wear a seat belt comfortably
- Carry out an emergency stop safely and with no pain or discomfort
- Look over your shoulder when manoeuvring the car

How to look after your back

Good posture helps you to look and feel better as well as protecting your joints and preventing pain and discomfort:

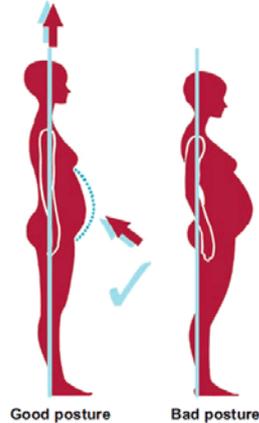
Getting out of bed

- As you lie on your back, bend your knees up
- Roll onto your side keeping your knees together
- Push to sit up sideways by pushing with your arms, while
- Dropping your lower legs over the side of the bed
- To get in to bed, reverse this process



Standing and Walking

- Check posture - stand and walk 'tall'
- Check the height of your work surfaces at home and work so that you stand upright or sit in a good position
- If you need to stand for a long time, place your front foot on a raised support to help ease discomfort

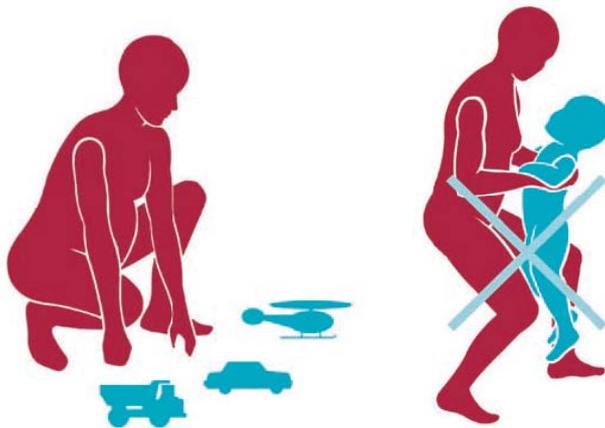


Lifting

Lifting must be kept to a minimum for the first few weeks. When dressing and bathing toddlers, or doing any of the other jobs that you do for them, always try to squat, sit or kneel down besides them.

If you do have to lift, then it is important to lift and bend correctly:

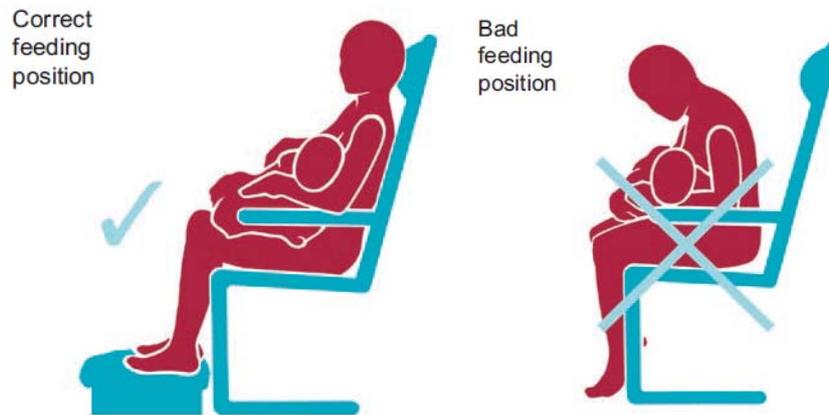
- Bend your knees, keep your back straight, pull your abdominal muscles in and tighten the pelvic floor
- Hold the object close to you
- Lift by straightening your knees and keeping your back straight



Feeding your baby

Sit in a comfortable upright chair. Put a small cushion or rolled-up towel behind your waist to support your lower spine. Make sure your feet are flat on the floor or are raised on a small stool if required.

Raise your baby to your breast or to the bottle by using pillows on your lap under the baby, rather than leaning forward over baby.



Other Activities

There are lots of everyday things that you do such as housework, shopping and transporting your baby. It is important that you pay attention to posture and back care in all of these activities.

Carry shopping in small, equal amounts using both arms.

Make sure that baby's sling is hung centrally. If you can kiss the top of baby's head then the sling is at the correct height.

If possible, choose a pram with handles that can be adjusted to the correct height for you.

Always lower the sides of the cot when lifting baby in and out.

Whilst baby car seats are ideal for carrying a sleeping baby, the combined weight of baby and the seat quickly becomes heavy and cumbersome. To protect your back, it is best to place the car seat on a pushchair frame (if you have a travel system). If you must carry it then carry it directly in front of the body using both arms rather than carrying it at the side of your body with your back twisted.

If you experience persistent back or pelvic pain that stops you from sleeping or carrying out reasonable activities, or if you experience any bowel or bladder leakage, please request a referral to physiotherapy with your Midwife or GP.

Further Information

Physiotherapy Outpatient Department telephone number: 01305 255314