



**Worcestershire
Acute Hospitals**
NHS Trust

POSTNATAL EXERCISES & ADVICE

Physiotherapy Department

This booklet provides advice and exercises to help you to get back to normal after the birth of your baby.

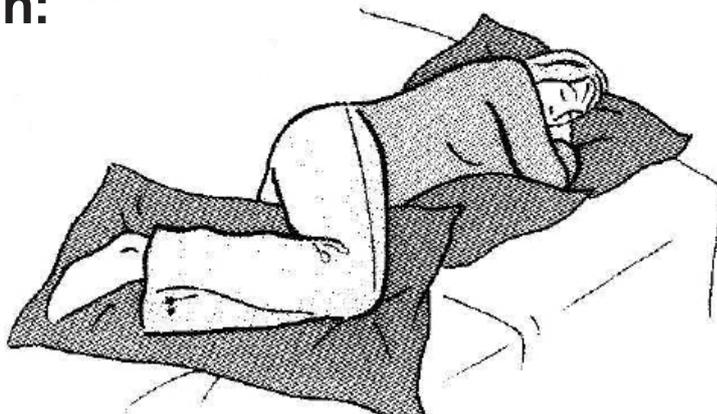
Rest:

After having your baby it is important to have sufficient rest to allow your body to recover. It may be helpful to use a method of relaxation. Try to sleep whilst your baby sleeps.

Comfortable resting position:

Lie on your side and place pillows under your abdomen and between your knees.

This position is comfortable especially if you have had stitches in either your abdomen or vagina or have 'piles'.



To turn in bed from lying on your back:

Bend both knees, keeping your feet on the bed, support the abdomen with your hand (if you have had a caesarean delivery), as you roll onto your side.

To get out of bed:

Bend both knees and roll onto your side. Push your body up by pressing down onto the mattress with your upper hand, allowing your feet to go down to the floor. Sit on the side of the bed for a few moments, and then stand by leaning forwards and pushing up with your hands and legs. Try to stand tall.

To get into bed:

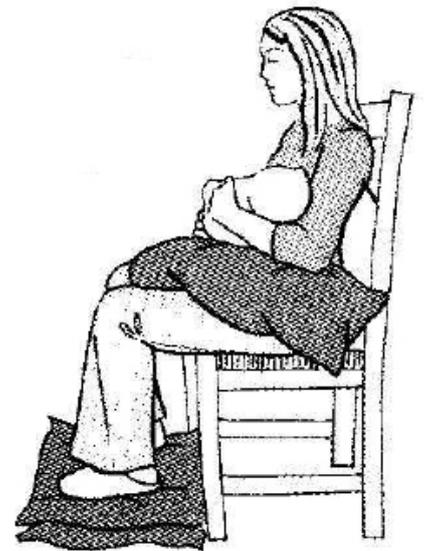
Stand with the back of your knees against the bed. Bend forwards slowly as you sit on the bed, then lower your head and shoulders sideways down onto the pillow, keeping your knees bent and together, lift your legs up at the same time.



If sitting is uncomfortable you can get into bed by kneeling on the bed and lowering yourself down onto your side.

Sitting and feeding:

Always sit well back in the chair. A pillow placed behind your waist will support you and may help relieve backache. Your feet should reach the floor. Pillows on your lap will bring the baby up to the level of your breasts for a comfortable feeding position. Make sure that your shoulders are relaxed.



Remember that you can also feed your baby whilst lying on your side in the good resting position described above.

ACTIVITIES IN THE EARLY DAYS AFTER DELIVERY

Bathing

Avoid bending forward and straining your back by kneeling down if you are washing the baby in your bath. If you are standing make sure that the baby bath or sink is at waist height, and wrap a towel around the taps to protect the baby.

Changing your baby

The surface on which you change your baby should be at waist height so that you do not have to bend forward, risking backache. It is easier to lift your baby from this height.

Circulation

If your ankles are swollen, put your feet up with your knees supported. When you are resting in bed or sitting in a chair, bend your feet and ankles up and down briskly 10 times every hour. Avoid sitting or lying with your legs or ankles crossed as this may restrict the blood flow. Avoid prolonged standing.

Posture

Regaining good posture after you have had a baby is important; this will help the way that you look and feel. Standing, sitting, lying or being active with good posture may help to avoid future aches and pains.

Caesarean Delivery - Extra information

You should follow all the above advice - because you have had an abdominal operation you will be tired. There are several layers of stitches in your lower abdomen that will take time to heal so increase your activities gradually as you feel able.

Take regular pain relief for as long as you require it. If you need to cough, sneeze or laugh, lean forwards supporting your wound - with your hands, a pillow or a small towel.

When you return home, accept all the help that is offered. Try to avoid strenuous activities for the first 6 weeks, e.g. prolonged standing, vacuuming, carrying heavy shopping. If you have a toddler, encourage him/her to climb up to you while you are sitting down rather than bending forward to pick him/her up.

Before driving again - check with your insurance company that you are covered: this will normally be 4-6 weeks after caesarean delivery. Ensure that you:-

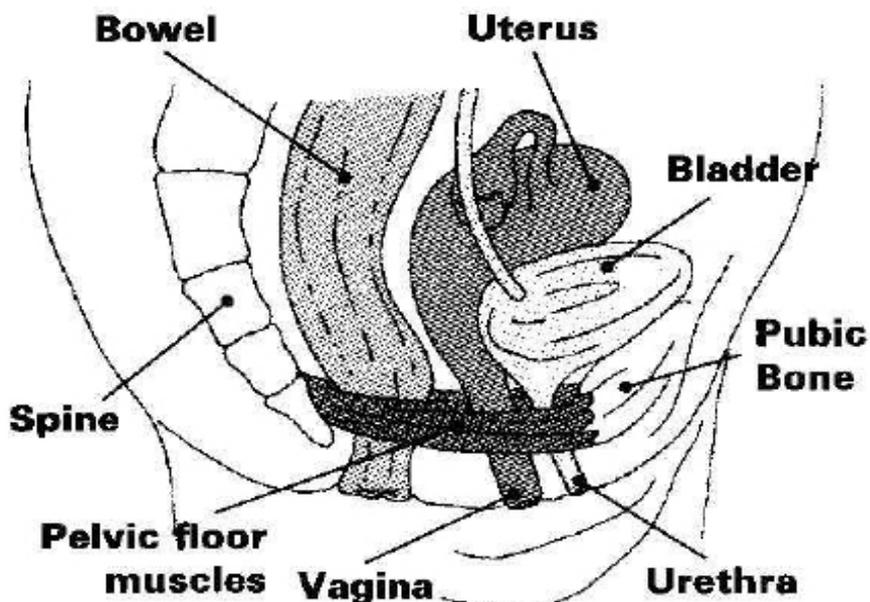
- can wear a seatbelt comfortably
- can turn the steering wheel without discomfort
- can apply the foot brake hard

EXERCISES

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

The pelvic floor muscles are at the bottom of your pelvis, supporting the pelvic organs. These muscles are stretched and weakened in pregnancy and during vaginal delivery. Pelvic floor muscle exercises are needed to:-

- Improve muscle strength so that you can control your bladder and bowel.
- Help prevent prolapse of the pelvic organs.
- Increase sexual enjoyment for you and your partner.



REMEMBER - wait until your urinary catheter (if you have one) is removed and you are passing urine normally before starting these exercises.

Start the pelvic floor muscle exercises as soon as possible after you have had your baby. If you are sore after your delivery, try to do them lying on your side. Gentle tightening and relaxing of these muscles may help ease discomfort, pain and swelling, and can aid healing if you have a tear or stitches.

HOW TO EXERCISE YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing urine and wind. Try to 'squeeze and lift' the pelvic floor muscles, gently closing and drawing up the vagina and back passage. Hold the gentle squeeze for a few seconds, and then relax for a few seconds, do not hold your breath.

Gradually increase the hold time and the number that you do until you can hold the squeeze for up to 10 seconds and repeat up to 10 times. You should do gentle abdominal hollowing at the same time (see page 6). Try exercising in different positions, (standing, sitting, lying) and establish a routine, such as every time you feed your baby.

It is also important that the pelvic floor muscles are able to work quickly to stop you leaking when you cough, sneeze or laugh. Tighten them as quickly and strongly as you can and then relax; do this up to 10 times at each session.

Always tighten your pelvic floor muscles before and during any activity requiring effort, for example when you are lifting, coughing or sneezing. To be effective you need to do the two types of pelvic floor exercise at least 4 times a day for 3 months.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises should be continued twice daily for life.

Further advice

If you are unable to control urine as usual, ask to see the specialist women's health physiotherapist.

- Do not stop and start the flow of urine.
- When having a bowel movement you may find some extra support will make you more comfortable; try holding a wad of toilet paper against your stitches - DO NOT STRAIN.
- Breathing out slowly as you move your bowels or pass urine may also help.
- Drink plenty of water - ensure that your urine is pale and your stool is soft.
- Drink as your thirst dictates if you are breast feeding.

EXERCISING YOUR ABDOMINAL MUSCLES

The abdominal muscles form a corset supporting your back and internal organs. These muscles have been stretched and become weakened during your pregnancy so you need to start to exercise and strengthen them as soon as possible. Exercises will help you to regain your body shape and prevent or relieve backache.

The abdominal hollowing exercise ('core exercise')

Start doing this exercise lying on your back or your side with your knees bent or sitting with your back well supported.

Place one or both hands on your lower abdomen, draw in your lower abdomen gently away from your hands towards your back, hold for up to 10 seconds and then relax.

You should breathe as you pull in this muscle and your lower back should stay still. Do this exercise up to 10 times.

Also try to practice it in standing. Use these deep muscles by doing the hollowing throughout the day - before and during any activity requiring effort, for example when lifting or changing your baby.

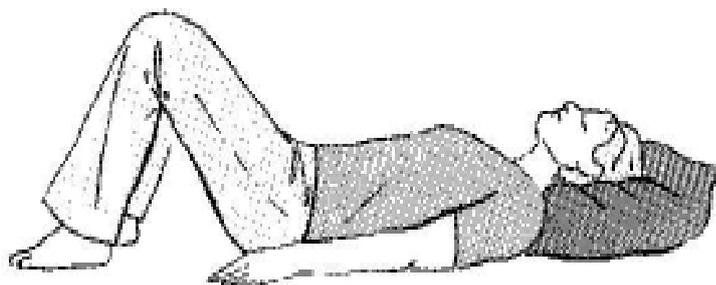
You should feel these muscles working as you do the gentle pelvic floor muscle exercise.

During pregnancy as your baby grows your tummy muscles naturally lengthen and stretch sideways. A gap forms between these two muscles called Diastasis of Rectus Abdominis. This gap is usually about 5cm (3 fingers) wide and gradually closes up after your baby is born. **It is important to take care not to let your tummy dome or bulge while doing any exercises.** If it does, stop that exercise, continue with abdominal hollowing and tell your postnatal ward physiotherapist. If you have left hospital, ask your GP for a referral to a specialist women's health physiotherapist.

The next two exercises are also useful in helping to relieve wind and nausea following a caesarean delivery. Start all exercises by lying with your head on a pillow and your knees bent.

1. Pelvic tilt

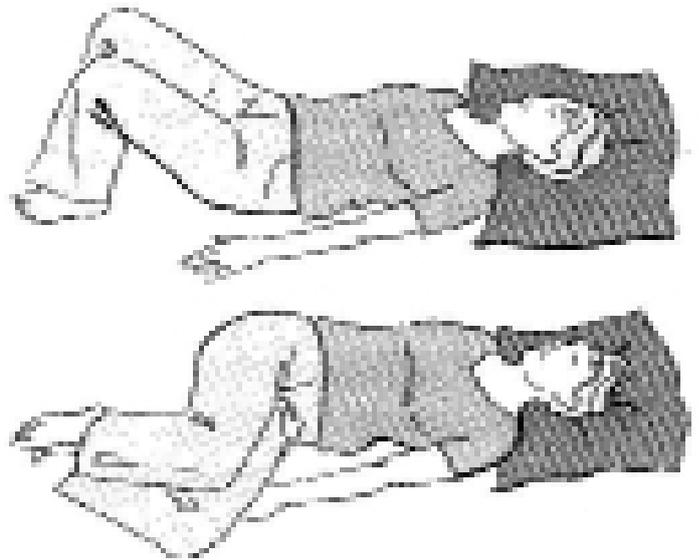
Hollow your abdomen as described previously, tighten your pelvic floor muscles and flatten your lower back into the bed as your pelvis tilts, then release gently. Repeat this up to 10 times several times each day.



The pelvic tilt exercises can be particularly helpful for maintaining muscle strength, correcting posture and easing back pain. Progress by holding the tilted position for up to 10 seconds before releasing.

2. Knee rolling

Hollow your abdomen and gently lower both knees to the right as far as it is comfortable. Bring them back to the middle and relax. Hollow your abdomen again and repeat to the left. Do this up to 10 times each way.



3. Knee Bends

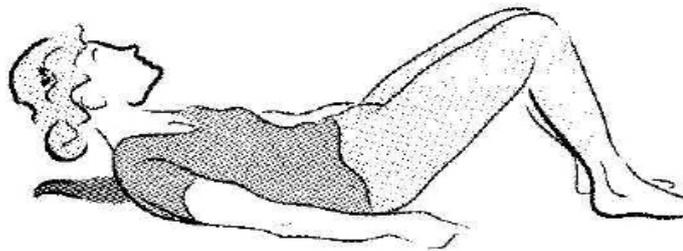
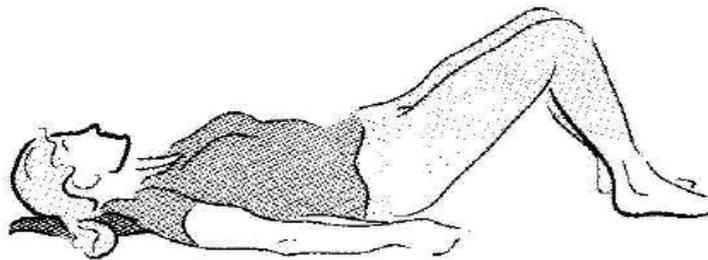
Hollow your abdomen, keep your back flat on the bed and bend one hip and knee up as far as is comfortable. Hold for 3 seconds and then bring the leg down so that the foot is back on the bed. Repeat with the other leg. Do this 3 times with each leg if you are able.



Gradually progress to holding each leg up for 10 seconds and repeating up to 10 times each side.

4. Head Lift

If you have neck pain DO NOT do this exercise. Hollow your abdomen and tighten the pelvic floor muscles as you gently lift your head a little way off the pillow. Hold for 3 seconds, then lower and relax. Repeat this 3 times. Gradually progress to holding your head off the pillow for up to 10 seconds and repeating up to 10 times. To progress further, remove the pillow then as you lift your head, raise your shoulders a little but ensure that you do not strain your neck muscles as you do this exercise. Increase the length of hold and the repetitions as before.



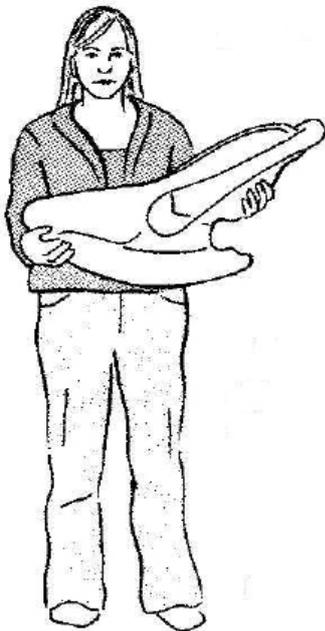
Try to do these abdominal exercises at least twice a day for 6 weeks.

Your pelvic joints will take 3-6 months to return to their pre-pregnancy state and maybe longer if you are breast feeding. You can easily strain your back during this time so try to avoid lifting anything heavy.

Back Care - this is good advice for life.



If you do have to lift:
Always try to bend your knees.
Hollow your abdomen.
Tighten your pelvic floor muscles.
Breathe out as you lift.
Hold what you are lifting close to the front of your body.



The only safe way to transport a baby in a car is in a properly fitting car seat. It should not be used for carrying the baby whilst out walking: use a pushchair or pram.

EXERCISE

Becoming active again as soon as possible after delivery may mean that there is less chance of developing postnatal depression BUT exercise should relieve stress rather than making it worse.

Care should be taken not to start high impact activity too soon.

Brisk walking with your baby is an excellent way to exercise. Ensure the pram handles are at the correct height for you so that you do not have to bend forwards or reach upwards. Gradually increase the time and pace of your walking every day during the first 6 weeks.

You can start swimming once you have had a week clear from bleeding or discharge. If you have had a caesarean delivery you should wait until your wound is well healed. After 6 weeks it is usually safe to recommence gentle exercising and sport as long as you have perfect bladder control and are performing all the postnatal exercises above without difficulty. By 12 weeks you may be back to your former level of activity.

Always listen to your body and remember to do your core abdominal hollowing and pelvic floor tightening during exercise whenever you can.

People recover at different rates. Many women feel extremely tired after childbirth so pace yourself, limit your visitors and have plenty of rest. Accept offers of help and set aside a regular time to rest.

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Some women prefer to wait six weeks until they have had their GP check up; however, if there are no problems you can resume intercourse when you feel like it. Start gently and use lubrication if required. If you have persistent discomfort or pain with intercourse ask your GP for further help.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Ask to see a specialist women's health physiotherapist if you have any pelvic girdle pain, urinary or bowel leakage or uncontrolled loss of wind, sudden vaginal discomfort, backache or bulging of your abdominal muscles.

QUERIES

If you have any queries about any of the advice contained in this booklet or if you require further advice from a Chartered Physiotherapist please contact your local Physiotherapy Department between 8.30am and 4.30pm Monday to Friday on the direct dial numbers below:-

Worcestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 01905 760622 / 760187

Alexandra Hospital, Redditch

Tel: 01527 512114

Kidderminster Hospital

Tel: 01562 513066

