

Post natal exercises



Exercise 1

Pelvic floor exercise

This will help:

- relieve soreness, bruising or swelling
- re-strengthen the muscles around your vagina which have been stretched during pregnancy and labour
- the area to heal
- encourage the return of normal feeling.

In any position, lying, sitting or standing:

1. Concentrate on relaxing in the area of your front and back passages.
2. Slowly tighten the muscles of your back passage and then your front passage.
3. Feel the squeeze and lift inside.
4. Hold tightly for four seconds and relax.

Repeat this frequently - at least 5 times an hour.

Exercise 2

Deep breathing

This will help open the lower part of your lungs, which may have been restricted while you were pregnant.

1. Breathe in slowly and deeply; feel your ribs and stomach stretching up and out.
2. Relax.
3. Breathe out, and feel your ribs sink back down again.

This feels good, and can help rest and relaxation.

Exercise 3

Ankle exercises

These will:

- encourage the circulation in your legs; there is a greater risk of blood clots after having a baby
- lessen any puffiness or swelling around your ankles.

When resting on the bed with your feet up, move your feet up and down from the ankles, and round in circles.

If you have varicose veins, it's important not to cross your legs. This can block the flow of blood in your veins and make the swelling worse.

If your legs are very swollen and painful, you may need to wear support stockings for a time.

Abdominal muscle exercises

These will help you regain your figure and can relieve backache.

Exercise 4

Deep abdominal exercise

Lie on your side. Let your tummy relax. Breathe in. Breathe out and gently draw your lower abdomen in towards your spine. Hold for a few seconds, breathing normally. Your back and pelvis should not move.

Exercise 5

Pelvic tilt

4. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your head supported on a small cushion.
5. Pull in your stomach muscles, then push the back of your waist on to the bed. Your pubic bone should rock upwards.
6. Hold for 4 seconds and relax.



After 48 hours, try these extra exercises. Don't do them if you notice your stomach muscles peak or bulge when you strain upwards or forwards. Contact your obstetric physiotherapist instead. The number is given at the end of this leaflet.

Exercise 6

Knee roll

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and together.
2. Keep your shoulders firmly on the bed and your stomach pulled in.
3. Keeping feet and knees together, slowly roll your knees towards the bed as far as is comfortable.
4. Roll back to the middle, rest and repeat to the other side.

Eventually, your knees should touch each side of the bed.



Repeat these exercises 5 times each to start with, then gradually increase the number of times over the next week. Continue your exercises for 6 weeks after your baby is born.

Remember... little and often is better than one long session.

After 6 weeks, but not before, you can try some stronger abdominal exercises.

Exercise 7

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your head supported on a small cushion.
2. Pull your stomach in, keep it flat, tilt your pelvis and keep your chin tucked in to your chest.
3. Tighten pelvic floor, slide your hands forward along the front of your thighs towards your knees, curling your stomach muscles up.
4. Hold for 4 seconds and then lie back and relax.



Repeat 4 times, always keeping your stomach pulled in flat.

Exercise 8

Use the same position as for the previous exercise.

1. Pull in your stomach, tilt your pelvis and tuck in your chin.
2. Tighten pelvic floor, stretch your left hand along the front of your right thigh, towards your knee.
3. Hold for 4 seconds, then lie back and relax.
4. Repeat on the other side.



Do this 4 times each side to start with.

You can make these exercises more difficult by:

- using exercise 7, but keep your arms straight by your sides; remember to keep your stomach flat, and curl up slowly from the floor
- using exercise 7, work the muscles even harder by keeping your arms crossed over your chest
- remember to concentrate on curling your stomach muscles rather than reaching with your chin.

Warning...

Don't attempt to do 'sit-ups' or 'double leg lifts' at any time. These two exercises could injure your back and put too much strain on your internal organs and pelvic floor muscles.

Progression of pelvic floor

The pelvic floor is made up of muscles which support your abdominal contents and control your front and back passages.

Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind, and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine mid-stream. The feeling is one of "squeeze and lift", closing and drawing up the back and front passages.

5. Hold the lift for as long as you can.
6. Release.
7. Rest (approx 4 seconds).
8. Repeat as many times as you can.
9. Now do up to ten short, sharp contractions.

It is important to do this without tightening your buttocks, squeezing your legs together or holding your breath! In other words, only pelvic floor muscles and deep stomach muscles should be working.

Do this exercise as often as you can anytime, anywhere, in any position. Repeat 2 or 3 times a day for the rest of your life!

Posture and lifting

Remember to:

- stand tall
- pull your stomach in
- tuck your bottom in



- sit well back in your chair
- support your back with a cushion or roll
- keep your feet supported on the floor or a small stool
- support your baby on a pillow.

Lifting

If possible, wait until you have good control of your pelvic floor muscles before you lift; this will be 2 or 3 weeks after the birth.

Lift correctly:

- bend your knees
- pull in your stomach and tighten your pelvic floor before you lift
- don't carry the baby or a toddler on one hip.



Sport or vigorous activity

Your ligaments will be stretchy and relaxed for up to 6 months after the birth of your baby. Therefore, don't go back to vigorous activity for at least 3 months, for example step aerobics.

After this time, try jumping up and down 4 or 5 times with a full bladder and, at the same time, cough. If you can't do this without losing control of your urine, you are not ready to go back to vigorous exercise. If you do, you can cause problems for the future such as incontinence.

Regular walking and swimming is a good and safe exercise, and you can do this after 4 weeks.

Bowels

If you have stitches, you may be anxious about opening your bowels. Try not to delay, as this will cause constipation and more pressure. To relieve the pressure, hold a doubled sanitary pad against your stitches to support them.

Coughing

This puts considerable strain on your pelvic floor muscles. Remember to tighten them before you cough or sneeze.

Feeding your baby

Spend a little extra time getting yourself really comfortable. Try to sit:

- with your back well supported and your legs over a pillow
- or
- in a good firm chair with your feet flat on the floor.

Try to avoid perching on the edge of the bed.

Rest

It is very important, not only to make up for lost sleep, but also to help your body return to normal. If you are tired, try to make time to lie down.

Scar tissue

If your scar is still painful after 6 weeks when opening your bowels or making love, massage this area with KY Jelly or Vaseline as soon as your stitches have healed. This will soften the scar tissue, or physiotherapy may help.

Waterworks/bladder

Don't be satisfied with less than perfection. You should have complete control over your urine and bowels.

If you have other questions about any of this information, please contact your GP, midwife, health visitor or obstetric physiotherapist.

If you have any queries, please contact your obstetric physiotherapist.

Your obstetric physiotherapist is:

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Tel: 01872 252601 or 252885

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

