

Physiotherapy post natal exercises and advice

For the first 6 weeks after having your baby, all the exercises should feel comfortable and should not hurt. Your pelvic floor exercises may feel a little difficult at first.

Circulation Advice and Exercises

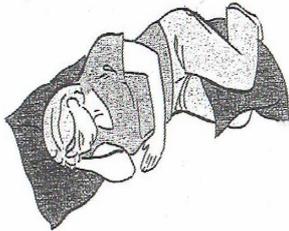
Ankles and Feet

- If your ankles are swollen, put your feet up with your knees supported.
- When resting, circle your feet and ankles briskly for 30 seconds each hour.
- Avoid sitting with your legs or ankles crossed as this may restrict blood flow.

Hands

- If your hands are swollen, sit with your hands resting on your head.
- When you are resting in a chair, hold your arms up in the air and waggle your fingers.
- Gently clench your hands into a fist then stretch them out.

Getting Moving



To turn in bed from lying on your back

Bend both knees up, keeping your feet on the bed. Suck in your tummy towards your spine making sure your tummy does not dome! Roll on to your side. Placing a pillow under the lower part of your abdomen and between your knees will help you to rest comfortably, especially if you have backache.



To get out of bed

Bend both knees, keeping your feet on the bed. Roll onto your side as described above. Push your body up by pressing down into the mattress with your upper hand, allowing your feet to go down to the floor. Sit on the side of the bed for a minute, and then stand by pushing up with your hands and legs. Stand tall.



To get into bed

Stand with the back of your knees against the bed, support your abdomen with one hand and put the other on the bed behind you. Bend forwards as you sit. Lower your head and shoulders sideways down on to the pillow, lifting your legs up at the same time. Keeping knees bent, roll onto your back.

Back Care

Remember always to look after your back. Because of changes in your abdominal muscles and hormonal levels your back is particularly vulnerable. Before pregnancy the abdomen is completely enclosed by its muscles. As the baby develops, stretching of the muscles can occur, and sometimes they separate centrally. Even though the muscles are weak they can recover if a progressive abdominal strengthening exercise programme is practised regularly. These stomach muscles, alongside your pelvic floor and your deeper tummy muscles, provide the stability for your back.

When lifting, plan the lift first, tense your stomach and brace your pelvic floor muscles, then lift by bending your knees and keeping your back as straight as possible. Hold the load close to your body. Whether you are breast or bottle feeding, pillows will help to raise your baby up to help you to maintain a good posture.



When sitting, sit well back in your chair, feet on the floor or a footrest. If necessary place a small roll in your back at waistline level to give you extra support. Try to make sure that the baby-changing surface is the right height so you do not need to bend your back

AVOID

Care must be taken to avoid the following movements until abdominal muscle tone is regained:

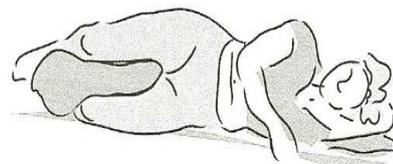
- any general rotational movements of the body or side bending,
- heavy lifting,
- never consider doing sit ups, jack knife or double straight leg lifts.

Abdominal Exercises

You can begin these exercises on day 1 after giving birth.

The deep stomach exercise

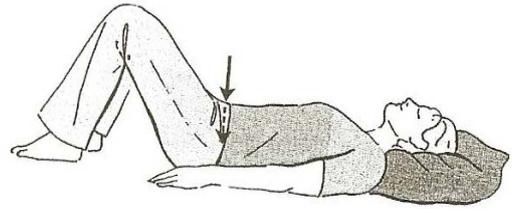
For the first six weeks after giving birth, you should exercise in a comfortable position – perhaps lying on your side. Let your tummy sag! Breathe in gently. As you breathe out, gently draw in the lower part of your stomach, squeezing your pelvic floor as well. Relax your tummy muscles. Don't move your back. You should be able to breathe and talk while you exercise. Repeat this movement five times, with a few seconds rest between each one. Aim to build up gradually – holding the muscles in for 10 seconds and repeating up to 10 times.



Pelvic Tilting

Lie with your head on the pillow, knees bent and shoulder length apart. This exercise works the muscles across your lower stomach which supports your back and pelvis. Hollow your abdomen and flatten your back into the bed as your pelvis tilts. Breathe normally.

Hold the position for 3-4 seconds and release gently. Repeat this up to 6 times, 3-4 times per day.



How should I progress with these exercises?

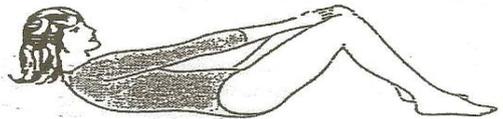
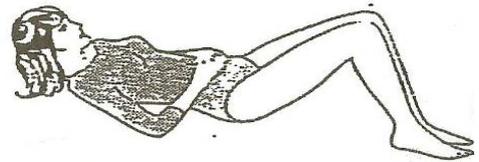
If you have had a normal delivery you can progress these exercises after 2 weeks, if you can brace your abdominal muscles tightly.

If you have had a caesarean section then progress your exercises after 3 weeks, if you can brace your abdominal muscles tightly. Do the exercises three times a day, starting with 2 of each and building up to 10.

Lying on your back knees bent, feet flat. Pull in and tighten your abdominal, buttock and pelvic floor muscles. Lift head and look at your knees, keeping your waist and back firmly on the floor. Let your breath go slowly as you lift your head. Lower head and relax.

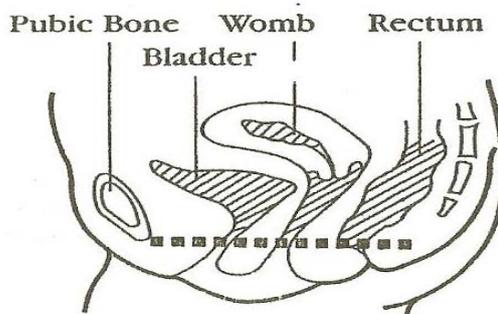
Variations

1. Lift head and shoulders taking hands towards knees.
2. Lift head and shoulders taking one hand towards opposite knee.

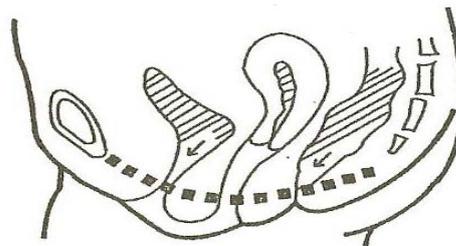


Pelvic Floor Muscles

These are the muscles which support your abdominal contents and control your front and back passages.



Pelvic floor in good condition



A pelvic floor that has become weakened

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In other words, only pelvic floor muscles should be working.

- squeeze, lift, lift again and then hold for as long as you can,
- release, controlling your pelvic floor back down,
- rest (approx. 4 seconds),
- repeat as many times as you can. Aim to build up to 10 repeats, holding for 10 seconds,
- now, squeeze, lift, lift again and do up to 10 short, fast contractions with your pelvic floor held in the elevated position.

Perform this section as often as you can (hourly) anytime, anywhere, any position.

Continue doing your exercises for at least 3 months after the birth of your baby. It can take a while to strengthen these muscles, so persevere. Keep feeling you are lifting these muscles higher and holding for longer. Remember it can take several months for the pelvic floor muscles to return to their pre-pregnancy strength.

Returning to normal activities

Try to take plenty of rest; only start gentle housework as you feel up to it. Take all offers of help! Avoid heavy housework – e.g. no vacuuming for six weeks. Walking is an excellent exercise after about 10 days – gradually increase the distances you walk. Gentle swimming may be started at six weeks after your post-natal check. Yoga and Pilates are particularly good to do at this stage. Do not undertake strenuous sports such as squash, aerobics, step aerobics, for six months.

Sexual intercourse can be re-commenced if there are no problems and you feel ready for it. Some ladies prefer to wait until after their six-week post-natal check. Use plenty of lubrication and start out gently.

Ongoing problems

You should ask your GP for advice if you have any of the problems below. He or she may then refer you to a Women's Health physiotherapist.

- Persistent pain in your back, pelvis, pubic bone, groin or stomach.
- A stomach that remains bulging and floppy more than six weeks after the birth.
- Any problems with loss of bladder or bowel control – such as wetting, soiling or having to rush to the toilet.
- Difficulties with sexual intercourse.

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