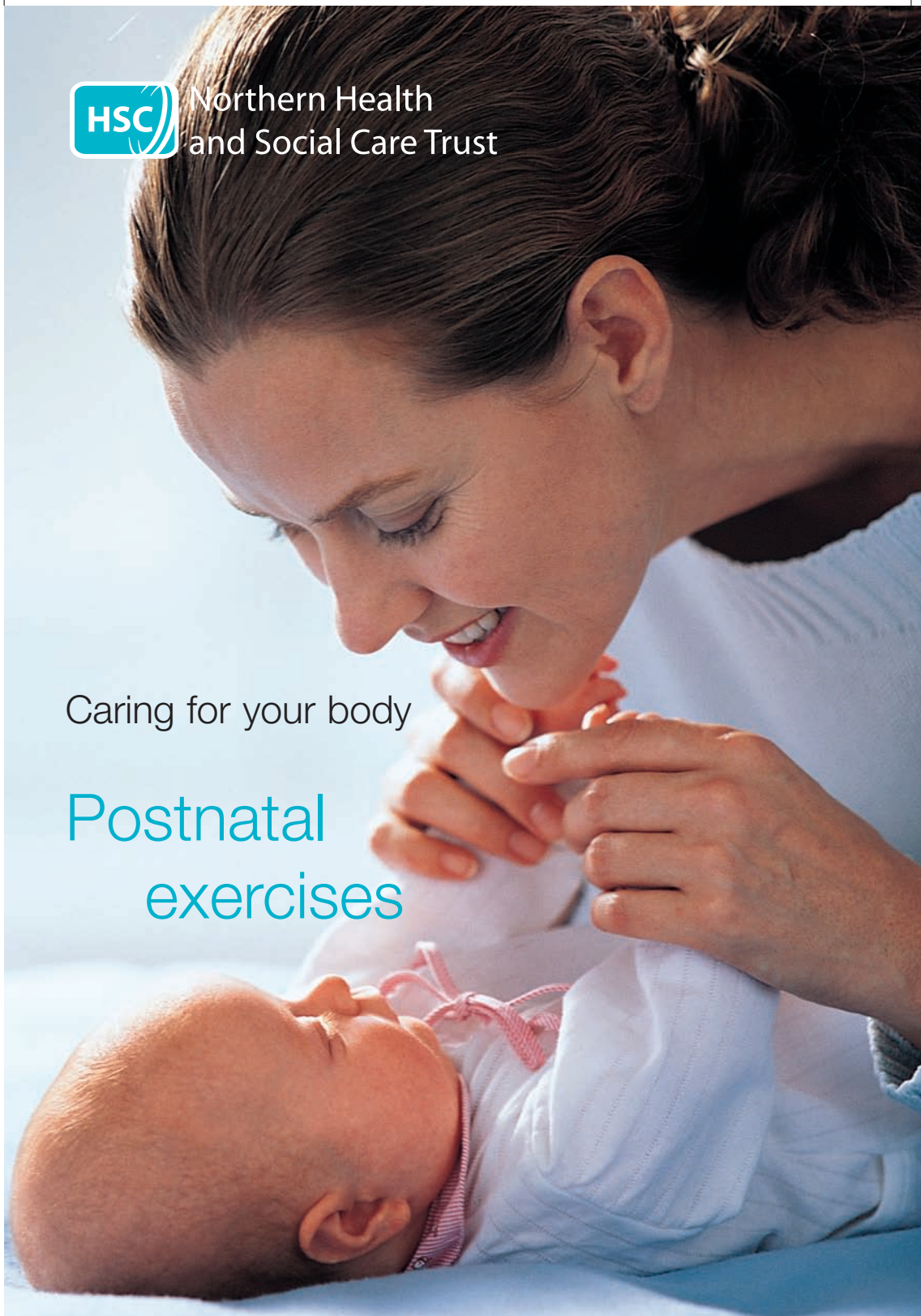




Northern Health
and Social Care Trust

Caring for your body

Postnatal exercises



Postnatal Exercises

FROM DELIVERY TO SIX MONTHS

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Written by the Obstetric Physiotherapy Service
in conjunction with the Health Improvement Service.

Introduction

This booklet has been written to inform mothers on aspects of care after delivery.

The contents support information provided by the physiotherapist on the maternity wards.

These exercises help to:

- improve your circulation;
- strengthen your pelvic floor muscles;
- prevent backache; and
- strengthen your tummy muscles.

This booklet can be used by all mothers, **including those who have had a Caesarean section.**

It will also be a useful guide for mothers who do not have the opportunity to see the physiotherapist after delivery.

You may wish to take medical advice before undertaking these exercises if you have a history of backache or other health problems.

First Day Onwards - Deep breathing & foot and ankle exercises

Deep breathing (all mothers)

- Lie on your bed with your knees bent, with a pillow behind you.
- Breathe in deeply through your nose. Sigh out.
- Repeat 5 times.
- Do this exercise frequently today.



Breathing exercises help to improve your circulation.

Foot and ankle exercises (all mothers)

Keep your knees relaxed for both exercises.

- Bend and stretch your ankles vigorously up and down for 30 seconds.
- Circle both feet 10 times in each direction.



Repeat these exercises frequently. They will help to reduce swollen ankles and varicose veins by improving circulation.



First Day Onwards - Sore stitches? Painful piles?

Sore Stitches? Painful Piles? (mothers who have had a vaginal delivery)

During the rest period, turn over and lie on your tummy. Place a pillow below your waist and another under your ankles. This is a very comfortable position which removes pressure on your stitches or haemorrhoids.



Toilet - tips to ease discomfort

- **Passing urine**

To prevent urine touching your stitches and stinging you, sit down with your knees well apart and lean forward before you start to pass urine. Rest your forearms on your thighs to support your back.

- **Moving your bowels**

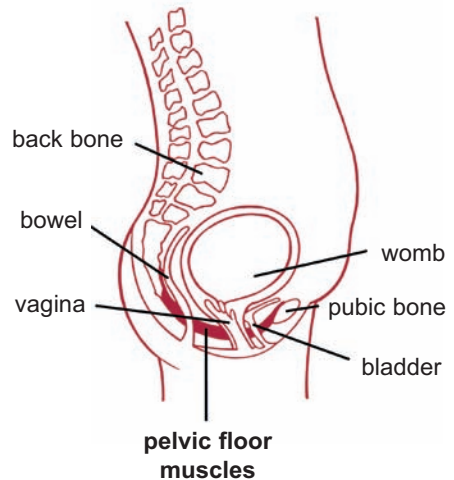
It may be several days before you wish to move your bowels. When it is time, take two clean sanitary towels with you. Empty your bladder, fold one towel in half, then hold it firmly against your stitches. Relax, take your time and don't worry, your stitches will not burst.

First Day Onwards - Pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor exercises (for all mothers)

Pelvic floor muscles are stretched during pregnancy and childbirth. Strong pelvic floor muscles are essential to prevent leakage of urine when you sneeze or cough, for enjoyable sexual intercourse and to give you complete control of your bowels.

Strong muscles will also help prevent you developing a prolapsed womb (your womb coming down inside your vagina).



You can do this exercise standing, sitting or lying.

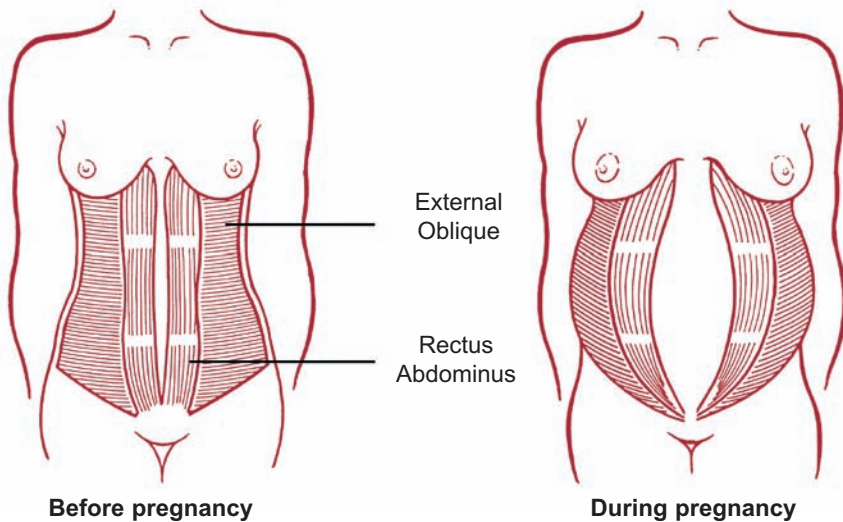
- Pull the area around your vagina up and away from your sanitary towel.



This exercise is especially important if you have stitches.

Repeat this exercise very frequently as movement will improve your circulation and will help you to heal quickly.

Your abdominal muscles – ‘Nature’s perfect corset’



During pregnancy your tummy muscles will soften and stretch to accommodate your growing baby. This is normal and natural.

However, you need gentle tummy exercises to prevent over-stretching and encourage closure of the separation after birth.

To check the separation yourself:

Lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Tilt your pelvis backwards. Stretch one arm down towards your feet. Place the fingers of your other hand just below your belly button. Raise your head and shoulders off the floor. You will feel two firm ridges of muscle coming closer together, almost everyone has a gap of two fingers wide. If, after five days, you have a gap of more than four fingers, ask to see a physiotherapist.

- Your tummy muscles lengthen from 33cm (13ins) to 51cm (20ins) during pregnancy and can be very weak following delivery.
- Always roll over in bed, tuck your tummy in, keeping your knees together and use your elbows for support when getting in and out of bed.

First Day Onwards - Pelvic tilting exercises

If you don't feel ready to do the following exercises, then continue with the exercises on page 6 of the Antenatal Exercises leaflet.

Pelvic tilting exercise (for all mothers)

- Lie on a firm surface with knees bent and a comfortable pillow beneath your head.
- Pull in your tummy.
- Press the lower part of your back down flat.
- Hold for several seconds, let go and repeat.



Repeat all these exercises until you go home.

Good posture



- Stand tall
- Bottom tucked in
- Tummy in
- Relaxed knees
- Pelvic floor up

Toddlers can be very heavy, your body may be weak. Lift your toddler as little as possible. When you do lift him / her, pull up your pelvic floor muscles, keep your back straight and bend your knees to reduce strain.



Ways to prevent backache

Make feeding time for your baby a resting time for you. Select a comfortable armchair which supports the middle of your back - you could put a rolled-up towel behind your waist. The back of the chair should be tall enough to support your head. Put a small stool beneath your feet.

Correct feeding position



Bad feeding position



Backcare

- Bend your knees, keep your back straight and avoid twisting it when using a vacuum cleaner, floor brush or mop.
- Always lower the cot sides when lifting your toddler in or out of his / her cot.



Stronger tummy muscles

Check your tummy separation before you progress to the following exercises. (See page 7). Slowly increase the number of times you do them.

Starting positions for both exercises:

- Lie on the floor with a small pillow beneath your head.
- Bend up your knees, tilt your pelvis back and pull up your pelvic floor.



- Breathe out.
- Tighten your tummy, lift up your head.
- Reach both hands forward to touch your knees.
- Hold for a few seconds, lower slowly.
- Breathe in.
- Rest.



- Breathe out.
- Tighten your tummy, lift up your head.
- Reach with one hand towards the opposite ankle.
- Hold for a few seconds, lower slowly.
- Breathe in.
- Rest.
- Repeat to the other side.

When you go home

Look after yourself

Looking after a new baby can be exhausting.

Rest every afternoon for an hour, if possible.



Getting back to normal

Eat well

Diet: The nutritional needs of a breastfeeding mother may be greater than those before pregnancy. Ask to see the hospital or community dietitian.

Are you overweight? Do not go on a strict diet without consulting the dietitian who can provide you with a healthy eating plan.

Sexual Intercourse

You may make love as soon as you are well healed and feel comfortable. Your community midwife or health visitor can advise you about contraception.

Exercise

- Walk briskly as often as you can.
- Cycle when you feel comfortable.
- Swim after six weeks if loss has stopped.
- **Pelvic floor exercises should be continued for life.**
- Pull up your pelvic floor muscles to reduce strain every time you:
 - PUSH: your pram, a heavy door, supermarket trolley, etc.
 - PULL: furniture, fitted sheets onto a mattress, etc.
 - LIFT OR CARRY: your baby, vacuum cleaner, groceries, coal, etc. and when you COUGH, SNEEZE or BLOW YOUR NOSE.

General notes

Drink 2-3 pints of fluid daily. If you are leaking urine, do not restrict or decrease fluid intake as this may make your condition worse. If your doctor has restricted your intake on medical grounds, please follow their instructions.

- Pass water every 3-4 hours. Do not hold on longer than 5-6 hours during the daytime.
- Do not go just in case, wait until you need to go.
- Sit down properly on the toilet, do not hover above the seat.
- Avoid constipation. Do not strain if you do become constipated. Seek medical advice straight away. Find out the cause and carry out your doctor's treatment.
- Avoid exercises such as star jumps and sit ups.

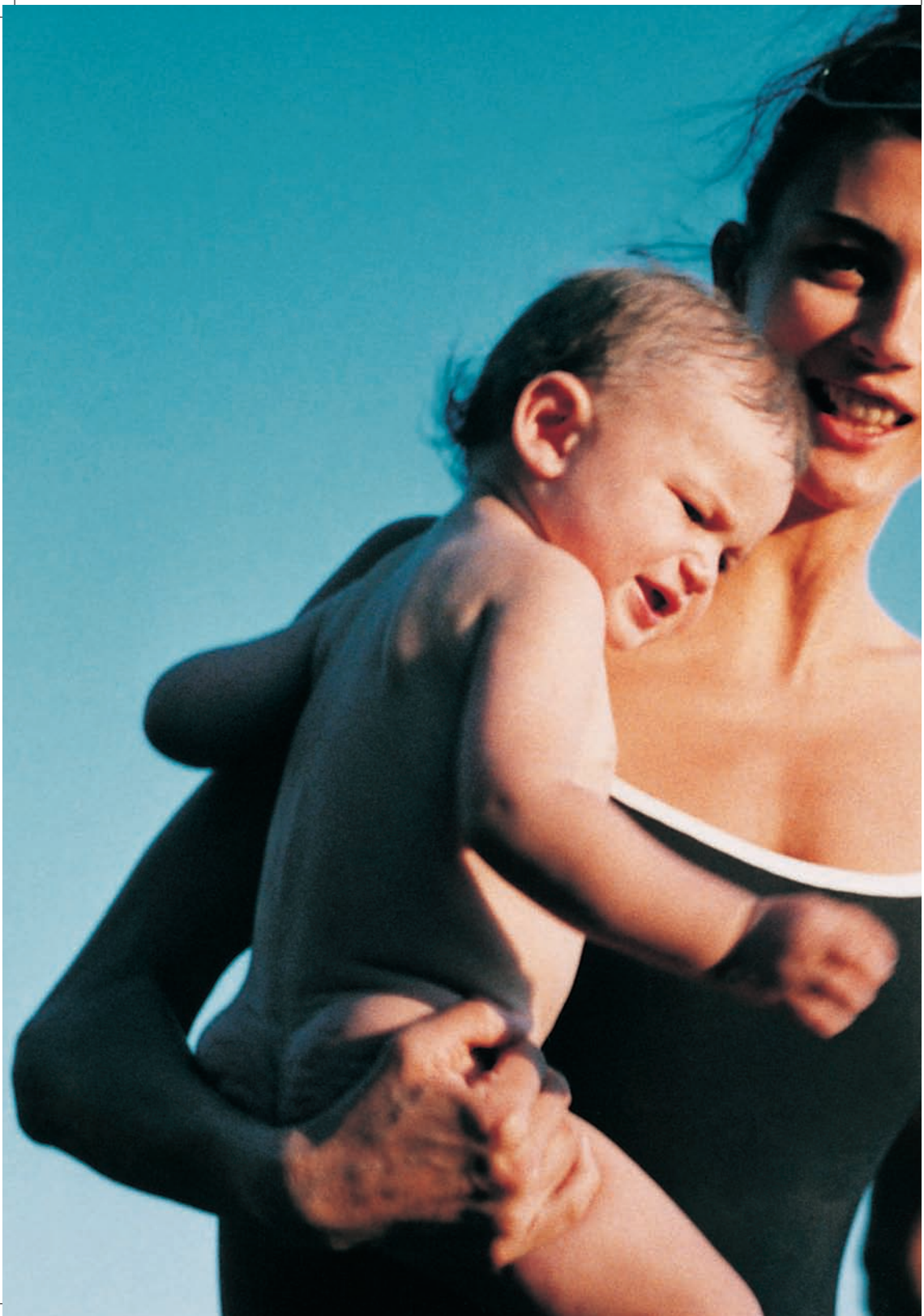
Conclusion

Looking after yourself during your childbearing years will help you to remain fit for an active life of your own.

Following these simple exercises after delivery will ensure that your body returns to normal.

Three months after your baby is born, you should be able to exert yourself without any leakage of urine. After three months, if you are still leaking or suffering from vaginal wind, decreased sensation during intercourse or an alteration in bladder sensation, get in touch with your physiotherapy department who will refer you to a physiotherapist specialising in women's health. Alternatively, you could contact the Trust's continence advisor. The number will be available at your local Health Centre.

Your body may take five months to fully recover following the birth of a baby. You should return to sport and vigorous exercise gradually.







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