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## Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email [asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net](mailto:asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net). If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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## Contact details

If you need any further support or advice, you can contact one of the team below;

POGP Physiotherapists

Tel            01932 722547

Email         [asp-tr.stpetersphysioappointments@nhs.net](mailto:asp-tr.stpetersphysioappointments@nhs.net)

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**If you notice any bulging of your abdominal muscles while doing any of the following 4 exercises, stop the exercise, return to abdominal hollowing and seek advice from your specialist physiotherapist.**

The next exercises are also useful in helping to relieve wind and nausea following a Caesarean section operation.

Start all exercises by lying with your head on a pillow, knees bent, with your feet on the bed a shoulder width apart, and arms by your side.

### **Pelvic tilt**

Hollow your abdomen as described above, tighten your pelvic floor muscles, and flatten your lower back into the bed as your pelvis tilts. Breathe normally. Hold the position for 3 seconds and release gently. Repeat this up to 10 times, 3 times per day. The pelvic tilt exercise can be particularly helpful for maintaining abdominal muscle strength, correcting posture, and easing back pain. Progress by doing this exercise when in sitting, standing, crouching, kneeling, or lying on your side.

### **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 up to the count of 10, and then bring the leg down so that the foot is back on the bed. Repeat with the other side.



## **Your bladder and bowels**

- Make sure you are emptying your bladder regularly, particularly if you have had an epidural.
- If you can't pass urine, inform your midwife immediately.
- If you are unable to control and pass urine as usual, ask to see the specialist physiotherapist or talk to your midwife.
- Do not 'stop and start' the flow of urine.
- Do not get into the habit of going to the toilet 'just in case'.
- Some people experience constipation - sitting in the right position on the toilet helps your muscles to relax and makes it easier to open your bowels. Placing something under your feet and leaning forwards will make it easier to open your bowels (see picture below).
- When having a bowel movement, you may find some extra support will make you more comfortable. Try holding a wad of toilet paper or a sanitary pad firmly in front of the back passage. If you have had a Caesarean section operation, supporting your wound with a folded towel may also help. **DO NOT STRAIN** and **DO NOT RUSH**.
- Breathing out slowly as you move your bowels or pass urine may also help.
- Drink 1.5-2 litres (3-4 pints) of fluids per day to include water / squash and eat plenty of fibre.



## Exercises in the early days

The exercises are gentle and will help to put you back on the road to fitness after delivery. **Remember not to push through pain.**

These exercises will help you to:

- be comfortable after delivery
- move more easily (both on the ward and at home)
- exercise the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles
- start to regain your physical activity

## Circulatory exercises

Do these exercises during your stay in hospital and at home or if you are resting in bed more than usual.

1. Take a deep breath. Rest, then repeat three times.
  - Inhale: into tummy (tummy should rise) and inflate lungs fully
  - Exhale: from your mouth and allow tummy to relax back down
2. Circle your ankles x 5 (best with your feet supported in bed or on a stool), point and pull toes up and down briskly for 30 seconds
3. Bend and straighten your knees x 5
4. Clench your buttock muscles and release x 5

## The abdominal hollowing exercise ('core exercise')

Start doing this exercise in the most comfortable position for you; for example, lying on your back or side with your knees bent, or sitting with your back well supported.

- Place one or both hands on your abdomen, below the level of your belly button. Breathe in through your nose, and as you breathe out, draw in your lower abdomen, pulling it gently away from your hands towards your back and then relax.
- You should be able to breathe and talk while you are doing this exercise and your lower back should stay still.
- Once you have learnt this exercise, you should be able to practise it in standing. To progress further, repeat as above, but keep your muscles drawn in for 3 seconds while you continue to breathe in and out normally.
- You should feel the muscles working under your hand, and you will gradually be able to hold for longer, until you reach 10 seconds and can repeat for a maximum of 10 times. Do this 3 times a day or as often as you can.
- Use this hollowing technique throughout the day - before and during any physical activity requiring effort; for example, when lifting.
- You may also feel these muscles working as you do the pelvic floor muscle exercises.





- Try to avoid any activity that causes strain for the first 6 weeks (e.g. prolonged standing, housework and carrying heavy things).
- Don't lift anything heavy for at least 6 weeks (e.g. heavy shopping bags, washing baskets and furniture).
- Driving after a Caesarean section operation, check with your insurance company that you are covered. People are normally advised to wait until 4-6 weeks after the birth.

Also ensure that you:

- are able to concentrate fully on driving and the road around you
- can wear a seat belt comfortably - you may be more comfortable with some padding (e.g. a folded towel) between your tummy and the belt
- can look over your shoulder and turn the steering wheel without pain or discomfort
- can perform an emergency stop without undue pain - try it with the engine off before going out for the first time

## Exercises

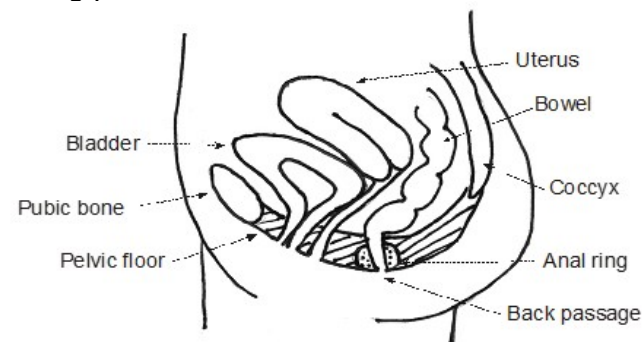
### Exercising your abdominal muscles

Your abdominal muscles form a natural corset supporting your back and internal organs. 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 deep abdominal support muscles may work at the same time as the pelvic floor muscles.

## Pelvic floor exercises

The pelvic floor is a large group of muscles that stretch from your tailbone (behind) and your pubic bone at the front, forming a bowl shape. They support your pelvic organs including your bladder, bowel, and womb. They help maintain continence, provide support to your pelvic organs, back and have a role in sexual function.

It is very important to start pelvic floor exercises as soon as possible, although discomfort from stitches or swelling may make you reluctant to do so. Frequent, gentle contractions will help the healing process.



Initially, choose a position in which you are most comfortable. This may be lying on the bed with no pressure on your pelvic floor, or side lying or sitting.

Slowly tighten the muscles around your anus and vagina, lifting up and in as if trying to stop yourself from passing wind and urine.

You may feel a gentle tightening in your lower stomach when contracting your pelvic floor. Try to avoid tightening your buttocks, squeezing your legs or holding your breath. Aim to complete the two exercises below 3-6 times a day.

- 1) To help build endurance in your muscles, contract your pelvic floor and squeeze for as long as you can (up to 10 seconds) then relax and release fully for 5 seconds. Repeat up to 10 times.



- 2) The muscles need to be able to work quickly and as strong as possible so that they can react to stresses such as coughing, sneezing or running.

Imagine the muscles are an elevator. Lift up the muscles to the top floor as quickly as you can. Relax fully. Repeat up to 10-20 times.



**Do not push through pain.**

Always tighten your pelvic floor muscles before and during any activity requiring physical effort; for example, when lifting, coughing, or sneezing.

Don't worry if you can feel very little happening to start with, gradually these muscles will become stronger. The hardest part is remembering to do the exercises **3-6 times a day**. To help you remember to do your exercises, try using a memory trigger such as timing them with mealtimes / feeding your baby, set an alarm on your phone, or download the NHS Squeezy App.



## Caesarean Section operation

If you have had a Caesarean section operation, you should follow all the above advice. However, because you have had an abdominal operation, you will be more tired. Do not expect too much too soon. There are stitches in your lower abdomen that will take time to heal, so increase your activities gradually:

- When you return home, accept all the help that is offered.
- Take regular pain relief for as long as you require it.
- In the early days, if you need to cough or sneeze, lean forwards, and support your wound - with your hands, a pillow or small towel.