

Jane Crookall Noble's Hospital Maternity Unit

# Advice and exercise following gynaecological surgery



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This leaflet is in addition to a specific leaflet on your surgery from the RCOG Royal College of Obstetricians' and Gynaecologists', which will be given to you by your nursing staff before/after your operation.

If you have any questions please discuss these with your nurse, doctor or physiotherapist.

This leaflet will help you to:

- Move more easily after your operation and prevent chest or circulatory problems
- Exercise your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles
- Regain your previous level of fitness following your surgery.

## First day after your surgery

Suffering pain can slow down your recovery so it is vital that you discuss any pain with your nurse, physiotherapist or doctor.



### Deep breathing exercises

Take a deep breath in through your nose, hold for three seconds, breathe out, and then repeat three times. As you breathe in, make sure you feel your waist expand. Try to do these exercises every hour.

### Supported cough

It is important to be able to cough well to clear mucus on your chest. You cannot harm your stitches or scar when you cough. You will be much more comfortable and able to cough if you support the site of your operation, by holding a folded towel or pillow firmly over your abdomen. If your operation is through the vagina, press firmly over your sanitary pad.



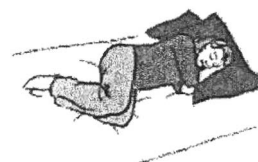
## Lower limb exercises

After your operation you will probably be wearing TED stockings (these are support stockings worn in hospital).



- You should do the following exercises to maintain blood flow in your veins and prevent blood clots. When resting in bed or sitting in your chair, bend your feet and ankles up and down briskly for 30 seconds every hour.
- Move each foot in a circular motion for 30 seconds.
- Bend and straighten your legs - one leg at a time, three times for each leg.

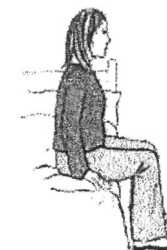
## Getting out of bed



To get out of bed, bend your knees up and roll onto your side.



Let your legs slide off the bed first, then push yourself up into a sitting position with your hands and forearm.



Sit for a minute, then when you are ready push up to stand, using your hands and legs, stand tall, and try to keep your back straight. This will help to prevent backache.

## Posture

- Good posture will help to prevent backache.
- Stand and sit up straight.
- Try to walk tall and avoid holding your tummy with your hands.

## Going to the toilet

After surgery you may have a catheter to drain your bladder for a few days. Once it is removed and you first attempt to pass urine, sit on the toilet, lean forwards and relax. If you have any difficulty, inform your nurse.

When having a bowel movement you may find it more comfortable by holding a wad of toilet paper or a sanitary pad firmly in front of the back passage. It is important that you sit with your knees above your hips and do not strain. Breathing out will help you to relax.



## Getting moving after surgery

After surgery, if you are feeling well enough, it is important to start to do short walks. This will help to improve your breathing and circulation. It will also relieve any discomfort from being in bed.

## Exercises after surgery

It is important to exercise your abdominal muscles after your surgery. They form a natural corset and help to support your back and internal organs.

You can start the exercises when you feel able to do so.

### Abdominal hollowing exercise

This exercise can be done lying on your back or side, sitting or standing.



Gently place your hand below your belly button. Breathe in through your nose. As you breathe out, draw in your lower tummy away from your hand towards your back and then relax.

You should be able to breathe and talk while you are doing the exercise. Aim to hold the tummy muscle in for ten seconds. Repeat at least 3-4 times per day or as often as you can.

To progress this exercise, start off by lying down, then progress to sitting and finally standing.

### Knee rolling

Lie with your knees bent and together and your feet on the bed. Draw in your abdominal muscles as described previously. Gently lower your knees to the right as far as is comfortable. Bring them back to the middle and repeat on the left. Do this five times, 3-4 times a day.



This exercise can relieve discomfort and help to get rid of wind.

### Pelvic tilting

Lie on your back, knees bent. Tuck your bottom under and flatten your back into the bed. Breathe normally. Hold this position for five seconds and relax. Repeat ten times 3-4 times daily.



## Pelvic floor exercises

Side view of bladder and related structures



The pelvic floor consists of layers of muscle and ligaments that stretch like a hammock from the pubic bone in front to the end of the backbone and from side to side (see diagram). Firm, supportive pelvic floor muscles help to hold the bladder, womb and bowel in place, and to close the bladder outlet and back passage.

You need to exercise them to:

- Reduce discomfort and swelling after your operation
- Prevent leakage from your bladder or bowel
- Help prevent prolapse of pelvic organs

If you have a catheter, wait until this is removed and you have passed urine before doing the pelvic floor exercises.

### How to do the pelvic floor exercises

Exercising the pelvic floor muscles at any age can strengthen them so that they once again give support. Like any other muscle in the body, the more you use and exercise them, the stronger your pelvic floor muscles will be.

Start by lying on your side or sitting on a chair. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and passing urine. It should feel like a 'squeeze and lift' from your back passage to the front. Start gently if you have had vaginal surgery.

There are two types of exercise, Slow and Fast:

1. **Slow ('squeeze and lift')**: Hold the squeeze for as long as you can, up to ten seconds. Then release and rest for four seconds. Repeat 5-10 times.
2. **Fast**: Follow this with up to ten quick strong contractions. These will help your muscles react quickly when you laugh, cough, sneeze, exercise or lift.

Practice these exercises four times a day.

To progress your pelvic floor exercises further try them in a standing position. Always try and use these muscles before and during any activity requiring effort such as coughing, laughing, sneezing and lifting.

## Making progress

Recovery from your operation varies from person to person. Your return to normal activity should be gradual.

## Exercises

Continue with the exercises in this leaflet for at least six weeks, preferably three months. You should be able to increase your activity levels quite rapidly over the first few weeks.

## Walking

This is a very valuable exercise. Try to walk for about 20 minutes at least once a day. Hills and stairs are quite safe, but build up speed and distance gradually. Many women should be able to walk for 30-60 minutes after two or three weeks.

## Sport

You may be able to start swimming 2-3 weeks after your operation, provided that vaginal bleeding and discharge has stopped and that your wound is dry and healed. If you are unsure please check with your GP.

If you build up gradually, the majority of women should be back to previous activity level within 4-6 weeks.

High impact sports should be avoided for at least six weeks. Always start slowly and if you experience any urinary leakage, you should stop and strengthen further your pelvic floor muscles.

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