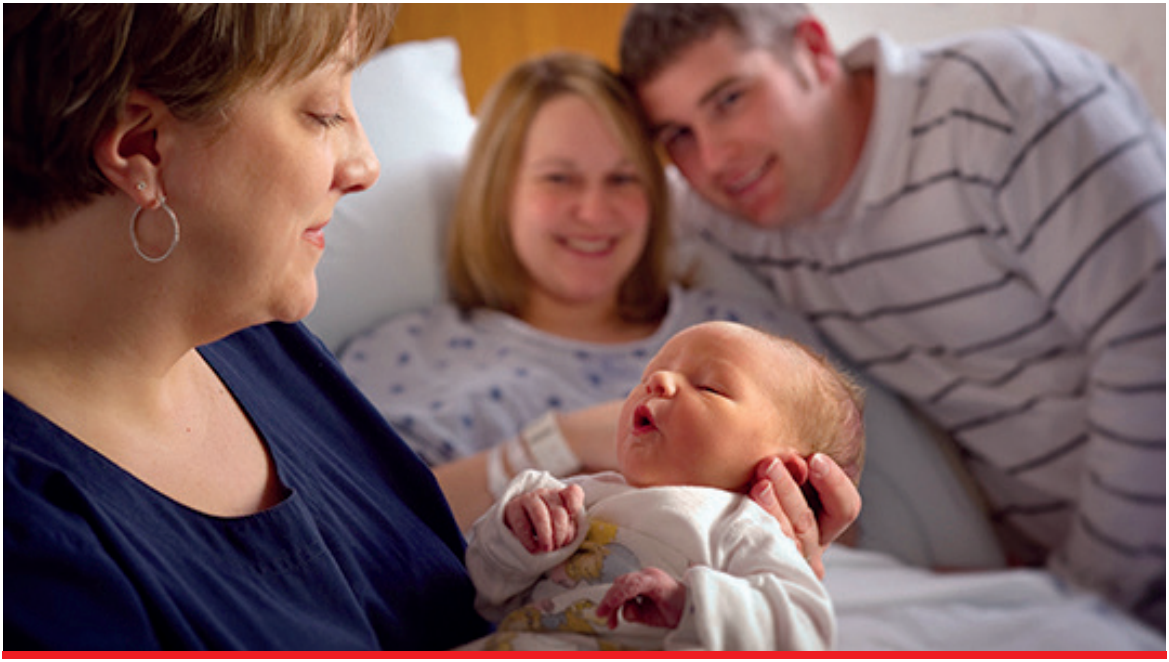
Post Natal Advice And Exercises For All New Mothers

Jane Crookall Noble's Hospital Maternity Unit



Noble's Hospital
Department of Health and Social Care

Rheynn Slaynt as Kiarail y Theay

Isle of Man Government
Reiltys Ellan Vannin

NH623

Caesarean Birth

You are free to move around as normally as possible. You will not do any damage to your wound. Even coughing or sneezing will NOT burst your wound! Your wound should be healing well after about 10 days.

You may have some post-operative discomfort but you are encouraged to get up and about as soon as you feel able. The information in this section is provided to help you recover from your caesarean section swiftly and safely.

Moving around in bed

To make moving around in bed more comfortable, here are some simple steps to follow:

- Avoid twisting movements.
- To get out of bed, roll over onto your side and let your legs drop over the edge of the bed. Push yourself up into a sitting position using your arms.

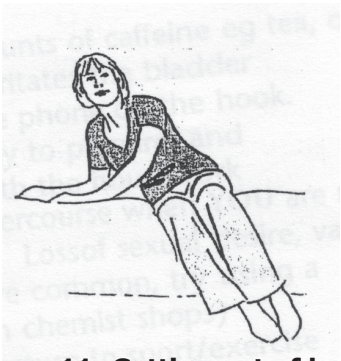


Figure 11: Getting out of bed

- To get into bed, sit as far up the bed as you can and lower yourself onto your side using your arms, gently lifting your legs as you go.

Wound support

Coughing, sneezing or laughing may pull on your tummy. To make it more comfortable try to:

- Draw in your tummy muscles.
- Support your wound with a pillow or towel or your hands and apply gentle pressure.
- Take enough pain killers, if you have been given them, to help you feel comfortable enough to move around.

Everyday activities

It is important to take time to return to your normal everyday activities.

- Gradually build up your level of activity and rest between activities.
- Accept help.
- Do not lift anything heavier than your baby for 6 weeks, and avoid lifting anything very heavy for 3 months.
- Help toddlers to climb (rather than lifting them) or let other people lift them for you.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before lifting your baby. (See 'To Do a Pelvic Floor Contraction' in this leaflet).

Driving

- Before returning to driving you must be confident that you can do an emergency stop. It normally takes about 6 weeks before you can do this comfortably and safely.
- **Check with your insurance company that you are covered to drive.**

Exercise

- Start with short sessions of gentle exercises for the first 6 weeks, such as walking.
- Gradually increase your fitness levels from 6 weeks, returning to normal exercise by about 12 weeks.
- Go back to swimming only after your 6-week check.

Specific exercises for your pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles are safe to do in the first few days after the birth, as you feel able. Please refer to further information in this leaflet.

Vaginal Birth (including forceps and ventouse)

Perineal care (area of soft tissue extending from the back passage to the vulva)

- It is important to keep your perineal area clean, especially if you have stitches. Gently rinse from front to back with plain water and dry carefully, especially after going to the toilet.
- Change sanitary pads regularly.
- Try to avoid sitting still for too long.
- Try lying on your side if you are in discomfort or during the night.
- Gently exercising the pelvic floor will help the healing process (see 'Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises' in this leaflet).

Bladder Care

- Make sure you are passing urine regularly.
- You may find you are less aware of the need to empty your bladder. If so, it is still important to go to the toilet approximately every 2-3 hours.
- Make sure you drink at least 2 litres of water each day, especially if you are breastfeeding, to avoid becoming dehydrated.
- If you have difficulty passing urine tell your midwife or GP.

Bowel Care

- Try to avoid getting constipated as it causes strain on the pelvic floor muscles and stitches.
- A healthy diet, including fruit and plenty of fluids, will help you return to a regular bowel habit.
- You may be prescribed medication for constipation such as lactulose or Fibogel.

Exercise

- Start with short sessions of gentle exercise, such as walking.
- Before returning to high impact exercise (e.g. jogging, aerobics) you should be able to hold your pelvic floor contraction for 10 seconds.
- Go back to swimming only after your 6-week check.

Specific exercises for your pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles are safe to do in the first few days as you feel able. Please refer to information in this leaflet.

General Advice For All New Mothers.

Keep your chest clear

If you need to cough to clear your chest and

a) have had a caesarean section

try taking a few deep breaths (in through your nose and out through your mouth).

Then bend your knees, support your wound with your hands (or a pillow) and try a firm cough. You may also try "huffing". This is a breath in, followed by a short, sharp breath out (as if steaming up a mirror).

Figure 1: Coughing

b) if you have vaginal stitches

you may wish to hold the sanitary pad firmly as you cough.

Circulation

These exercises can help to prevent deep vein thrombosis and swelling of the ankles. They should be done regularly throughout the day.

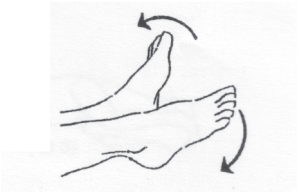


Figure 2: Circulation

a) Pedal your feet x 10

b) Circle your feet x 10

When resting, put your feet up on a stool if you can. Try not to sit with your legs crossed.

Caring for your back

It is vital that you take care of your back after you have had your baby. Your lower and upper back will be at risk of injury for up to six months following the delivery because:

a) your abdominal muscles, which normally help to support the spine, are weak and stretched.

b) Your joints are more flexible and at risk from damage, due to the increased hormones in your body.

c) Caring for your baby will involve lifting, carrying, feeding and changing – all activities that will put extra strain on your back.

Feeding

You can feed your baby in a variety of different positions. Try to find those which are most comfortable for you.

Lying on your side

Use a pillow behind your back and one between your knees. Place a pillow over your stomach to protect it from the baby's feet.

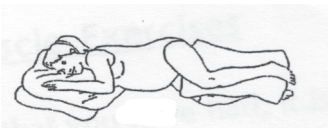


Figure 3: Side Lying

Sitting in a chair

Sit upright in the chair with a pillow at your back for support. Raise your feet on a footstool/step.

Place a pillow over your lap to raise your baby up to the breast/bottle. Try not to slouch. Avoid feeding your baby perched on the side of the bed or on the edge of a chair, you will get very tired and put your back at risk of injury.

Figure 4: Sitting

Changing your baby

Try changing your baby on a surface that is waist height. This should help you to avoid stooping but remember one day your baby will try to roll, so never leave baby unattended even for a second. You could try sitting with baby on your lap or kneeling at the side of your bed at home and having baby on top of the bed.

Lifting

Bend your knees and get close to whatever you are picking up. Remember to draw up your pelvic floor and draw in your stomach muscles as you lift as this will protect your spine and prevent urinary leakage.

Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

Regardless of the type of delivery that you have had, it is important to carry out pelvic floor muscle exercises.

Between our legs are a group of muscles which form the bottom (floor) of your pelvis (see picture below). These pelvic floor muscles are designed to:

a) Support the abdominal contents in the pelvis (including the pregnant uterus).

b) Control the outlets from the bladder and bowel.

c) Improve sexual satisfaction.

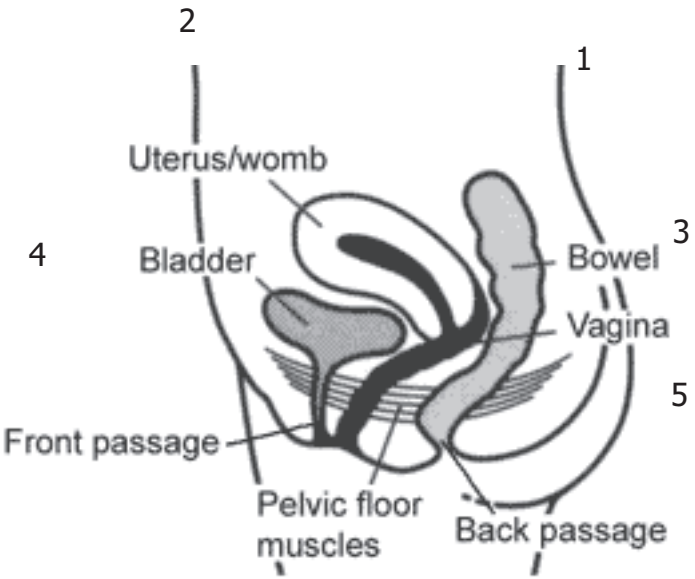


Figure 5: Pelvic Floor Muscles

1. Spine
2. Womb (uterus)
3. Rectum (bowel)
4. Bladder
5. Pelvic Floor (muscle)

The stresses and hormones of pregnancy and delivery can cause considerable weakening of the pelvic floor muscles so they will need to be strengthened. Even if you have had a caesarean section you will need to do these exercises. Only with strong pelvic floor muscles can you:

a) Prevent wetting yourself when you cough, sneeze, laugh, run, jump or even when you are on your way to the toilet.

b) Make it easier to hold a tampon in place.

c) Improve control over wind from the bowel.

d) Improve awareness and satisfaction during sexual intercourse.

To Do a Pelvic Floor Contraction

Tighten and lift the muscles around your anus (back passage) as if stopping wind escaping. Try to simultaneously tighten and lift the front passage as if stopping the flow of urine. Hold these muscles tight and keep breathing normally. Count in seconds until you can't hold any longer. As you feel the contraction fade let go (your holding time is up!).

We recommend you do gentle pelvic floor exercises early after your delivery (the following day). They can be done in any position e.g. lying, sitting or standing and can help to reduce swelling and/or bruising after a vaginal, forceps or ventouse delivery.

To Strengthen Your Pelvic Floor

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as previously described, and hold for as many seconds as you can. (A maximum of 10 seconds). Release the contraction, and rest for 4 seconds. Repeat the tightening and release movement as many times as you can. (Up to a maximum of 10).
- When you feel happy with this , lift and squeeze more firmly and quickly let go. This is called a "quick contraction", and will help your muscles react quickly when you laugh, sneeze or cough. Aim to do 10 quick contractions.
- Repeat the above sequence 4 to 6 times daily, gradually increasing your hold time and the number of squeezes you do. This is a part of your daily routine - NOT an exercise to be fitted in if you have time. It is part of looking after YOU.

Don't hold your breath OR tighten your *upper* stomach muscles, thighs or buttocks. There is advice later in the leaflet regarding the use of your lower abdominals in combination with your pelvic floor muscles.

Try To pull up your pelvic floor muscles whenever you laugh, sneeze, cough, lift, pull or push, blow your nose or exercise.

Doing pelvic floor exercises can prevent incontinence and the development of prolapse (organ descent) in later life.

Remember You should not be doing a "midstream stop" when passing urine. This is thought to increase the risk of bladder infections and cause problems emptying your bladder.

Section 3: Abdominal Exercises

These abdominal exercises are safe to do from the day following your delivery, whatever the type of delivery. The exercises in this leaflet are very gentle but very effective. NEVER do an exercise if it hurts. If so, stop the exercise and get advice from the midwife or physiotherapist. For each exercise, start with a hold of 5 seconds and repeat 5 times Try to do these exercises 3 times daily. They should only take a few minutes of your time.

Abdominal Muscles

The abdominal muscles are similar to an internal corset. The lower abdominal muscles (below the belly button) wrap around the pelvis and into the lower back. These muscles are extremely useful at supporting the lower back, flattening the stomach and improving posture. The following exercises will teach you to tighten these muscles.

Pelvic Tilt

- Lie on the bed with your knees bent.
- as you breathe out, gently draw your abdominal muscles in then flatten your back onto the bed, by tilting your pelvis backwards.

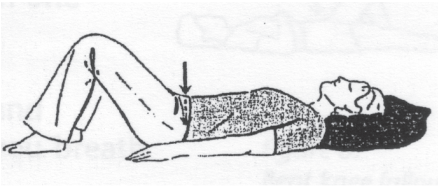


Figure 6: Pelvic Tilt

- breathe normally while holding this position **for 5** seconds.
- gently let go.

Lower Abdominals

- Lie on your side with a pillow between your knees.
- On your out breath, draw in your lower abdominal muscles (below the belly button) and gently tighten your pelvic floor.

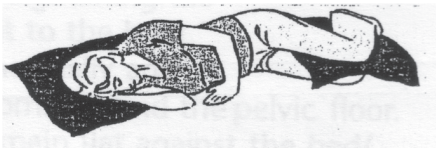


Figure 7: lower abdominals

- Hold the muscles in and breathe normally as you count to 5. Then let go.
- This exercise can also be done lying on your back with your knees bent or in standing.

Now you can tighten the pelvic floor and the lower abdominals together you should try to use them functionally i.e. when lifting your baby or toddler, hanging out the washing etc.

Bent Knee Fall out

- Lie on your back with **one** knee bent.
- Tighten your lower abdominal muscles and your pelvic floor as you breath out.

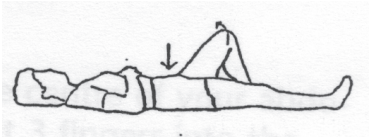


Figure 8: Bent Knee fallout

- SLOWLY drop **the bent knee** out to the side as far as is comfortable. Your pelvis should remain steady on the bed.
- Breath normally throughout but remember to keep the abdominals and the pelvic floor muscles gently tightened at all times.

Return the knee to the starting position, and then relax the stomach muscles. Repeat with the other leg.

- You may also try slowly straightening the bent knee then returning it to the bent position. Keep breathing normally and gently tightening the abdominals and the pelvic floor. Your lower back should remain flat against the bed/ floor. Do not allow the back to arch.

NB. Before starting the next page of exercises please note:

If your abdomen seems to "dome" i.e. goes into a marked peak when you cough or raise your head off the pillow you may wish to wait four more weeks before going on to the next set of exercises.

If you lift your head and feel down the centre of your abdomen you may feel a gap. If you can fit 3 fingers into the gap then wait 4 weeks.

If in doubt, please ask the ward physiotherapist for advice.

If you have had a caesarean section wait 6 weeks before progressing onto the following exercises.

Knee Bends

- Lie on your back with both knees bent.
- Tighten the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles as before.
- Slowly bring one knee in towards your chest until your hip reaches 90 degrees.

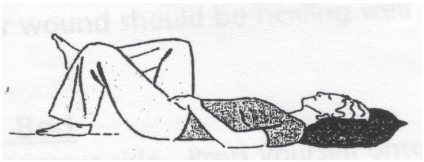


Figure 9: Knee Bends

- Return the leg to the starting position and relax the abdominal muscles. Remember to breathe normally throughout the entire movement.
- Repeat on the other side.

Head Raises

- Start with both knees bent.
- Tighten the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles gently as you breathe out Head raises and raise your head 5cm off the pillow. Hold for 3 seconds then relax.
- Repeat 5 times.

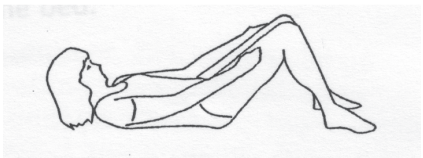


Figure 10: Head raises

Wind Pain

Try bending up your knees whilst lying on the bed and gently roll them from side to side only as far as is comfortable or try pelvic tilting (fig 6 on page 11).

Housework

This should be limited to light duties eg. dusting, watering plants etc. Heavy work such as vacuuming and carrying shopping should be avoided for about 6 weeks and lifting heavy objects eg toddlers should not be attempted for **about** 10-12 weeks.

All New Mum's - Remember....

It is NOT normal to have a leaky bladder no matter how old you are.

a) It is never too late to seek help for your pelvic floor muscles (See "further advice" below).

b) Watch your weight.

c) Keep up your fluid intake especially if breast feeding.

d) Avoid taking excessive amounts of caffeine eg tea, coffee, coke etc and alcohol - it irritates the bladder.

e) Rest is important - take the phone off the hook.

f) Keep meals simple and easy to prepare, and accept all offers of help with the housework.

g) You can resume sexual intercourse when YOU are ready.

Remember contraception! Loss of sexual desire, vaginal discomfort and dryness are common, try using a lubricant jelly (available in chemist shops).

h) Many women choose to return to sport/exercise two to three months after delivery, but everyone is different.

i) Exercise should always be undertaken gradually, particularly if you aren't used to it. Progress slowly.

j) Avoid bouncing exercises e.g. jogging. Wear a supportive bra. If breast feeding and always try to feed first before exercising.

If after following the advice in this leaflet you are still experiencing bladder or bowel problems please see your G.P for advice. If necessary they can refer you to see a women's health physiotherapist.

If you are having ongoing back or pelvis pains please refer yourself to self referral physiotherapy.

Women's Health Physiotherapy
Tel: 01624 642158

Self Referral Physiotherapy
www.gov.im/categories/health-and-wellbeing/therapy-services/physiotherapy/

Ref:
NHS Forthvalley Acute HQ
Westburn Avenue
Falkirk
FK1 5SV

This document can be provided in large print
or audio format on request.

Isle of Man
Government
Reiltys Ellan Vannin

The contents are the property of the Department of Health and Social Care
and should not be copied without its permission.

Department of Health and Social Care

Nobles Hospital, Braddan, Isle of Man, IM4 4RJ

Telephone: 01624 650000 www.gov.im/dhsc

Jane Crookall Maternity Unit Ward 10: 01624 650030

Printed: September 2017
Review: September 2020

Origination: Women & Children

printed by Mannin Group