

# Exercise and advice following the Caesarean birth of your baby

## Getting Comfortable

Resting in a well-supported position will help your tummy to feel more comfortable.

When sitting, place a small pillow in your lower back.

When lying on your back, try a pillow under your thighs/knees.

When lying on your side, try using pillows for support between your knees.

When standing, stand up tall as good posture is essential, it is more comfortable and it will help to protect your back.

Placing a pillow or towel over your tummy and supporting it will help to make it feel more comfortable when you cough, sneeze or open your bowels.

## Breathing Exercises

Whilst you are less active it is important that you do some breathing exercises regularly until you are up and about.

**Take a deep breath in through your nose; hold for a count of two, and breath out through your mouth.**

Try to repeat this exercise three times in a row, every hour. Practice as often as possible and continue until you are up and about. Continue this exercise throughout the first couple of weeks. This will help to get more air into your lungs and help to relax your tummy muscles.

## Getting out of bed

Bend your knees and roll on to your side, try to move both your upper and lower body at the same time to avoid twisting. Use your arms to push yourself up into a sitting position, allowing your legs to swing down at the same time. You can reverse this to get into bed.



## Circulation Exercises

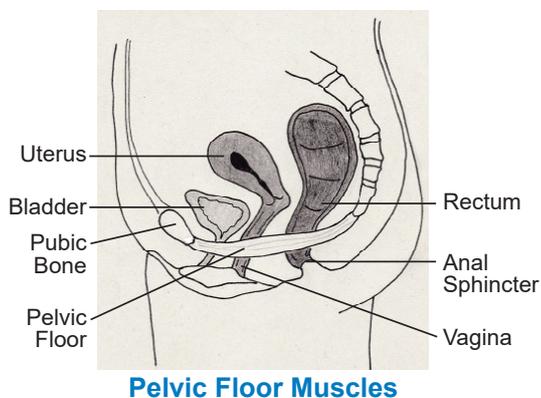
Briskly bend your feet up and down for 20-30 seconds. This will help to maintain your circulation and prevent/reduce swelling.

Start immediately, practice as often as possible and continue until you are up and about.

After you have given birth, you will understandably want to give your baby lots of attention, but it is also very important that you take a little time for yourself. This leaflet offers guidance on safe and effective exercises that will help you get back into shape.

## Pelvic Floor Exercises

Looking after your pelvic floor muscles is essential – following the birth and throughout your life. Initially, exercising them could help reduce discomfort and swelling. Longer term, toning up the muscles may prevent leakage from your bladder or bowel. It can also help safeguard against vaginal prolapse and may improve your sex life.



### The Basic Pelvic Floor Exercise

Choose any comfortable position, with your knees slightly apart. Many people find lying down with their knees bent is a good position to start or sitting on a hard surface.

Tighten up your back passage as though you are trying to stop passing wind. Then tighten the muscles that you would use to stop yourself passing urine. Do these 2 together and you should be exercising your pelvic floor muscles

The feeling is one of “squeeze and lift”.

### Remember:

You should start gently and stop if it hurts. Do not pull your stomach in excessively, squeeze your legs together, tighten your buttocks or hold your breath.

## The Pelvic Floor Exercise Programme

Now that you can do the basic exercise you can build up the endurance of the muscles so they will work harder and longer. Firstly though you need to determine your ‘**starting block**’.

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as previously described and hold for as long as you can (maximum 10 seconds).

### How many seconds can you hold this contraction?

Relax the contraction and rest for 5-10 seconds.

Then repeat the 'tighten, hold and relax' movement as many times as you can (maximum of 10).

### How many times can you repeat this?

This is your 'starting block'.

Now perform the basic exercise but squeeze and lift more firmly, and then let go straight away.

This is called a quick contraction and will help your muscles react quickly when you cough, sneeze or lift etc.

### How many quick contractions can you do?

Aim to increase this to a maximum of 10.

You should try to repeat your starting block and quick contractions 3 times a day.

Your starting block will change as the muscles get stronger, therefore re-assess this every few weeks.

## Strengthening your stomach

You should start exercises 1 and 2 for your stomach muscles as soon as you feel well enough.

### Remember:

Do not try any strong exercises such as sit-up or leg lifts lying on your back until after at least 12 weeks after delivery. Consult your Women's Health Physiotherapist if unsure.

Do not exercise if you feel tired or unwell.

## Exercise 1

### The Deep Stomach Muscle Exercise

This stage exercises the deep muscles in the stomach, which support the spine and the pelvis, and help to flatten the stomach.

For the first six weeks you should exercise in a comfortable position which could be laying with knees bent up, sitting or standing if able.

1. Let your tummy sag! Breathe gently.
2. As you breathe out, gently draw in the lower part of your stomach, squeezing your pelvic floor as well. Let go.

Do not move your back at any time and remember to breathe.

Repeat 4-5 times with a few seconds rest in-between.

Aim to build up to 10 second hold, repeat x 10.

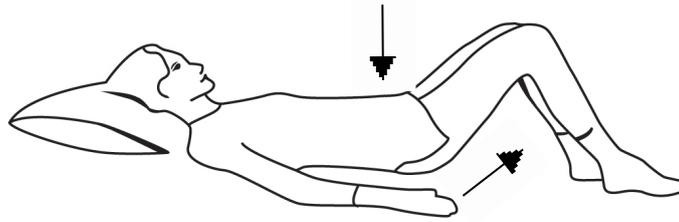
After six weeks you can progress to different starting positions e.g. Lying on your back with your knees bent up, lying on your front, or kneeling on your hands and knees.

You can gently contract you deep stomach muscles and pelvic floor when lifting, pushing and pulling to support your core.

## Exercise 2

Once you can comfortably complete stage 1 you can move to stage 2.

### The Pelvic Tilt



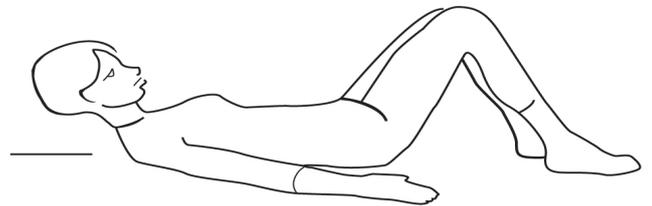
1. Lie in the position shown and tighten the deep stomach muscles.
2. Gently squeeze your pelvic floor and buttocks, tilt your pelvis up and flatten back down. Hold this for a maximum of 10 seconds and then release.

#### Remember:

Keep your stomach flat. If it bulges out go back to exercise 1, and try exercise 2 again in a few days.

### The Head Lift

1. Perform the pelvic tilt.
2. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles.
3. Lift your head only; hold for a few seconds and then release.



To progress you can prolong the hold to a maximum of 10 seconds – keep breathing. Do not do this exercise if you cannot stop your stomach bulging as you exercise. It may take several weeks before you reach this stage.

## Caring for your Back

### Your back may feel weaker after birth because:

- The deep stomach muscles, which normally help to support your lower back, are weaker following pregnancy.
- Caring for your baby will involve more lifting and bending etc, than you are used to, which can put increased strain on your back.

Always find a comfortable, well-supported position before carrying out everyday activities.

### Feeding:

Try sitting in a comfortable position. Place a pillow on your knees and use it to support the arm cradling the baby. You can also breastfeed while lying on your side.

### Changing:

Whether you sit, stand or kneel to change the baby, remember not to stoop.

## Lifting:

- The weight of your baby should be the heaviest thing you are lifting for up to 4-6 weeks, until you feel stronger.
- Take care when lifting your baby or anything else. Use your legs, bend your knees, keep a straight back and get close.
- Avoid lifting toddlers. If you have other children, you will obviously want to give them attention so try to squat down to their level or encourage them to climb up and sit beside you instead.

## Important Advice

**Exercise** – this should always be undertaken gradually, especially if you are not used to it. Many women choose to go back to exercise two to three months after a caesarean section, but everyone is different.

You can start gentle walking within the first week and swimming after six weeks as long as the wound has healed.

High impact exercises should be avoided until after 12 weeks.

If you have any questions on what you should or should not be doing, ask your women's health physiotherapist.

**You will feel tired – take plenty of rest.**

**Driving** – When you start driving again will depend on your rate of recovery, your ability to perform an emergency stop and your insurance cover, usually 4-6 week after your caesarean.

Start gradually with short distances.

**Sex** – when you feel ready.

You may feel a temporary lack of interest – this is normal.

Remember to use a contraceptive.

**If you have any further questions or need any support, speak to your GP or visit our PPHS website for more information.**

## Web Address

<https://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/womens-health/perinatal-pelvic-health-service>

## QR Code



**If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :**

Physiotherapy Department  
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary  
Telephone No: 01484 342434

MSK Physiotherapy Admin Office  
Telephone No: 01484 905380

[www.cht.nhs.uk](http://www.cht.nhs.uk)

**If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.**

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