

Rehabilitation Department

Exercise and advice following the birth of your baby

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 prolapse and may improve your sex life.

The Basic Pelvic Floor Exercise

Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine. The feeling is one of “squeeze and lift”, closing and drawing-up the back and the front passages. This is called a pelvic floor contraction.

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 five-ten 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 4-6 times a day. Your starting block will change as the muscles get stronger.

Toning up your stomach

You should start to tone up your stomach 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 – these may be harmful. Do not exercise if you feel tired or unwell.

Stage 1

The Deep Stomach Muscle Exercise

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

For the first six weeks you should exercise in a comfortable position – in sitting with a good posture, lying on your back or perhaps lying on your side.

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 front, and kneeling on your hands and knees.

Remember:

It is very important to use the deep stomach and pelvic floor muscles whilst carrying out everyday activities. Try to hold them in whilst carrying the baby, doing housework and lifting etc.

Stage 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 stage 1, and try stage 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

It is vital you take care of your back. It will be vulnerable for five to six months after the birth because:

- The deep stomach muscles, which normally help to stabilize your lower back, are weak.
- Your joints are more flexible and therefore more at risk of damage, due to the increased hormones in your body.
- Caring for your baby will involve more lifting and bending etc, than you are used to, which also puts increased strain on your back.

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

Feeding:

Try sitting with you feet raised on a pillow. 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:

When you lift remember to tighten the pelvic floor and deep stomach muscles. Use your legs, bend your knees and get close to whatever you are picking up.

Important Advice

Exercise – this should always be undertaken gradually, especially if you are not used to it. Many women choose to go back to sport two to three months after giving birth, but everyone is different. You can start swimming after six weeks. If you have any questions on what you should or should not be doing, ask your obstetric physiotherapist.

You will feel tired – take plenty of rest.

Driving – start gradually with short distances. When you start driving again will depend on your rate of recovery, usually after about one month. Check with your insurance company that you are covered.

Sex – when you feel ready. You may feel a temporary lack of interest – this is normal. Remember to use a contraceptive.

For further information contact:

Rehabilitation Department
Physiotherapy Department
Calderdale Royal Hospital
Telephone No: (01422) 224198

Scan the QR code below to take you to our website



<http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/>

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

Locality Manager
Rehabilitation Department
Calderdale Royal Hospital
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www.cht.nhs.uk

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