

General Exercise Information

Women's activity levels vary after giving birth due to their birth experience, previous fitness levels and tiredness.

The hormone relaxin softens the pelvic ligaments during pregnancy and these effects can still be present for up to 3 months after your baby's birth.

Be guided by how your body feels and progress your activity levels gradually. Pain or any increase in your vaginal bleeding may be signs of over activity.

Focus on increasing strength and stability in your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles. Strong abdominal muscles are necessary to support your spine, prevent back problems and to help reduce back pain. They also help improve your posture and flexibility.

If you have had a caesarean section your exercise programme may be 7 days behind women who have had a vaginal delivery.

To begin with you will be more comfortable if you support your wound with your hands, a pillow or towel when you cough, sneeze or laugh.

Lifting / driving guidelines

For the first 3 weeks avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby. For the next 3 weeks you will need to take care with lifting. Do not lift car seats or buggies for 6 weeks.

You can begin to drive when you feel comfortable and safe. You will need to inform your insurance company and follow any restrictions or time limits they have for driving after abdominal surgery.

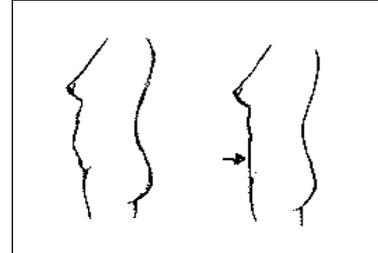
Back Care

Transversus Abdominus (low deep abdominal muscle)

This low abdominal muscle runs horizontally around the abdomen attaching to the spine. When it contracts it creates a rigid cylinder around the

abdomen providing stabilisation and protection of the spine during activity.

You can contract this muscle while you are sitting,



standing and lying.

How to do this:

Locate this muscle by placing one hand across your low abdomen (bikini line).

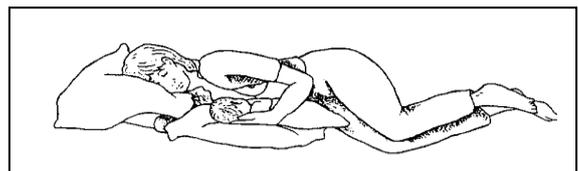
Draw in the muscle gently and slowly away from your hand towards your spine. Keep breathing and hold this contraction for 3—5 seconds.

Now use this muscle whenever you

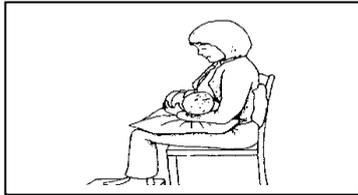
- pick up or put down baby
- lift objects
- move from sitting to standing
- stand and walk, aiming to increase the hold time to 10 - 20 seconds

Feeding posture

Before feeding your baby, ensure you are in a well supported comfortable position. Bring the baby up to your nipple with the support of pillows and relax while the baby feeds.

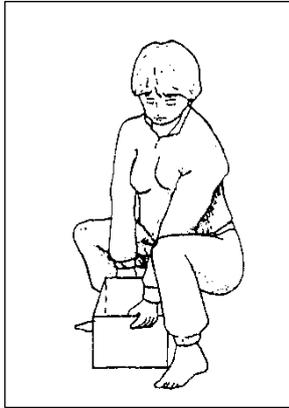


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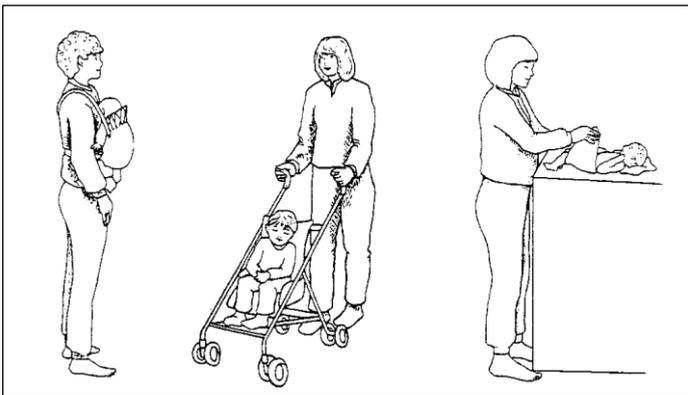


Lifting

- Before you lift:
- Draw in your low abdomen
- Bottom out and bend your knees
- Keep your back straight
- Hold load close to you
- Avoid twisting



Standing and Posture

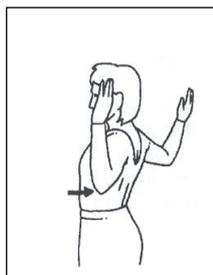


- Stand tall.
- Adjust working heights to keep back straight.

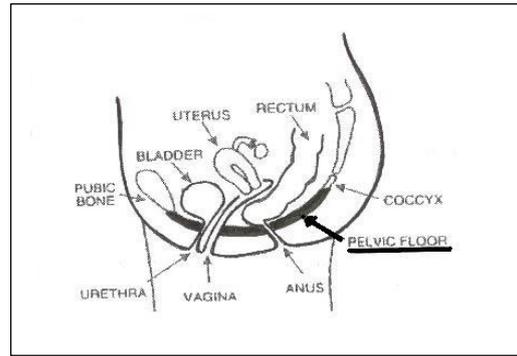
Upper back pain

Caring for your baby may cause upper backache. This stretch can give relief and help prevent this occurring.

- Sitting or standing with elbows bent – palms forward
- Push shoulder blades towards each other and then down
- Hold 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times



Pelvic Floor Muscles



These are a group of muscles stretching from your pubic bone in front to your tail bone.

During pregnancy hormones and the increasing weight of your baby soften and stretch the pelvic floor muscles. During birth these muscles stretch as they guide your baby through the birth canal.

Now that you have had your baby you should tone your pelvic floor muscles by exercise so that they become strong and functional again.

Good muscle tone will help you to:

- Stay dry when you cough or sneeze
- Play sport without the embarrassment of “wetting”
- Hold in a tampon
- Increase the sensation during sexual intercourse for both you and your partner

How to do the pelvic floor exercise

Draw up as if you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind from the bowel and urine from the bladder.

Initially while you are sore you may find it easier to gently “blink” the openings closed. Try and do a few every hour. As these muscles get stronger you will be able to squeeze harder and hold longer.

Weave them into your day by finding activities that remind you to exercise:

- Feeding your baby
- Changing your baby
- When showering
- After emptying your bladder or bowel
- Watching television

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Whenever you laugh, cough, sneeze or lift, do a maximal contraction and hold to prevent weakening your pelvic floor muscles.

How to empty your bowel

- Sit on the toilet. Keep your lower back straight and your feet on the floor
- Relax your lower tummy
- Breathe deep to fill your lower lungs with air
- Keep your lips slightly open and your teeth apart. Breathe out slowly
- You may wish to support the perineum by applying firm pressure with a pad at the front

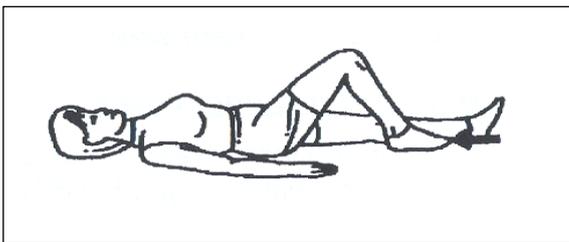


Exercises

The following exercises can be added from 2 days after a vaginal birth and one week after a caesarean birth. Always be guided by how your body feels. It's never too late to start these exercises.

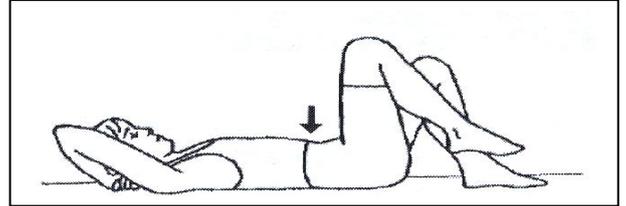
- Begin slowly
- Do 5 repetitions of each
- As you get stronger hold for longer and increase repetitions

Lying

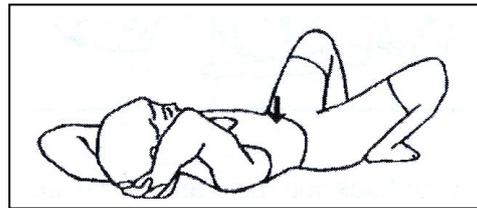


- Lie on your back with hips and knees bent and feet on floor
- Draw in your low abdominal muscle while continuing to breathe normally

- Slide one leg down so the hip and knee are straight then return to the start position. Repeat with other leg
- Your low abdominal muscle should stay tight during the movement and your back should not arch

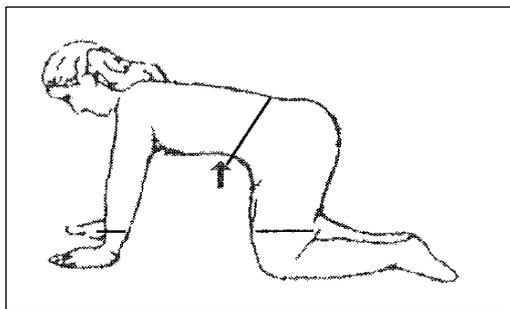


- On back with hips and knees bent and feet on floor
- Draw in low abdomen and hold firm throughout exercise. Breathe normally
- Do not arch your back
- Lift one foot off the floor a short distance bringing your knee towards your chest, then lower gently. Repeat with other leg



- Draw in low abdomen. Breathe normally
- Move one knee out to the side and towards the floor without moving the other knee and your pelvis (imagine you have a glass of water on your stomach which you must not spill). Repeat with other knee

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Kneeling

- Kneel on all fours with knees slightly apart and hands slightly wider than your shoulders
- The spine and neck should maintain their natural curves so your back is not rounded or hollowed
- Relax your low abdomen
- Slowly and gently draw in the low abdominal muscles towards your spine
- Continue with your breathing and keep your spine still

Build up to holding this exercise for 10 seconds.

Progress this exercise by:

- Gently lifting one hand just off the supporting surface while maintaining a low abdominal contraction
- Keep your spine still (imagine you have a glass of water on your back which must not spill)
- Return to start position
- Repeat five times each hand

Ongoing Physical Activity

Continue with your daily abdominal and pelvic floor exercises.

Walking is enjoyable and can help you sleep better and deal with the demands of a new baby. Begin with 10 minute walks on the flat before progressing to hills. Gradually increase the amount of time you walk for and distance walked.

Once your wound has fully healed and your bleeding has stopped you can commence swimming again.

You can return to the gym and more vigorous exercise from 3 months after your baby's birth. The speed of your recovery will be dependent on several factors including your pregnancy, your birth experience and whether you have other children.

The hormone relaxin that loosens your pelvic ligaments during pregnancy can take up to 3 months to disappear from your body. This will have an effect on your ability to perform aerobic type exercise — build up to this gradually and always listen to your body.

Contact us

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Hours: 8am-4.30pm, Monday to Friday