



**HUTT** maternity

Hutt Valley Maternity Care



## **Postnatal Physiotherapy** Information for mothers

Congratulations on your new baby!

We hope you find the information in this booklet useful in assisting with your postnatal recovery.

# Immediately After Your Baby's birth

Following the birth of your baby, there are a few simple steps that you can take to improve your postnatal recovery.

## **Rest – lie down for 30 minutes at least twice a day**

It is important to get as much rest as you can during the first 3 days following birth. Lying down will help to reduce discomfort and swelling, and will take extra weight off your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles.



## **Ice – 20 minutes every 2-3 hours**

Following a vaginal birth, or an attempted vaginal birth, placing ice inside your pad will help reduce the pain and swelling around your perineum.

## **Compression – wear firm, supportive underwear**

Wearing firm, supportive underwear will help support the perineum and thereby reduce pain and minimize swelling. It will also help to start the healing process. As a general guide, garments should be two sizes bigger than your pre-pregnancy size.

## **Exercise – pelvic floor muscles exercises**



Pelvic floor exercises help to increase the blood flow to the perineum, and this is important for healing. These exercises will also assist in reducing your risk of incontinence; These exercises can be safely started 1-3 days after the birth of your baby, as long as there is no increase in your pain. **These exercises are crucial, and described in detail later in this booklet**

# After a Caesarean Birth

When resting in bed, it is important to do regular exercises to prevent problem developing in your chest or blood circulation.

## Breathing Exercises

- Take 5 deep breaths every hour while you are awake
- If you need to cough, support your wound using your hands or a pillow

## Circulation Exercises

- Move your feet forwards and back, 20 times every hour
- Brace the back of your knees into the bed and hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times every hour.

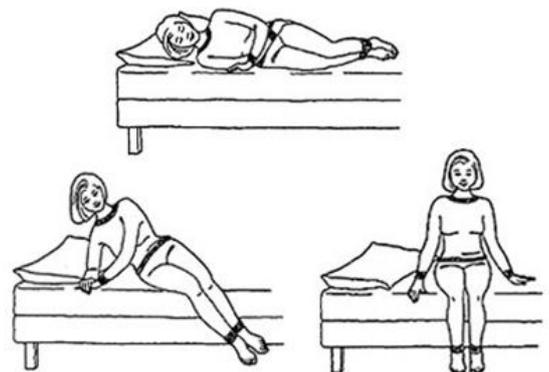
## Important Information

- To assist with the healing of your wound – it is advised that for the first 6 weeks you do not lift anything heavier than your baby, or drive. Note that you may not be covered by your insurance if you do drive before this time.

## Getting in and out of bed

This is a useful way to support your stomach muscles while getting in and out of bed. You will find this technique most comfortable, especially following a caesarean birth.

1. Bend your knees and roll onto your side
2. Slide your feet over the side of the bed and push yourself up using both of your hands in front of your body.

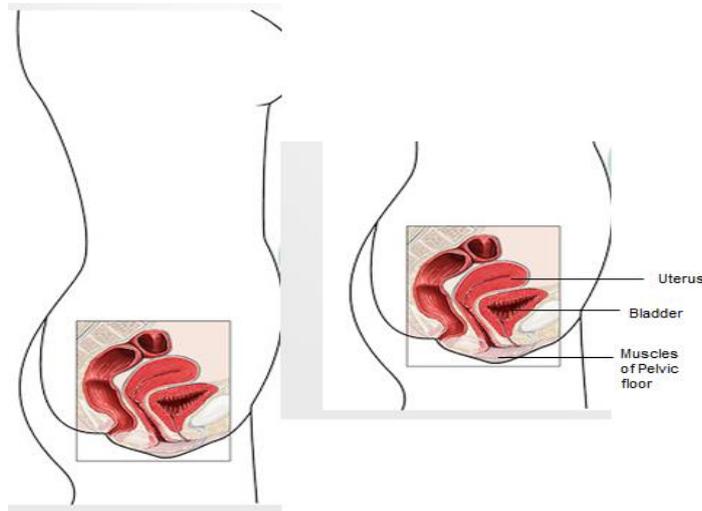


Do the same in reverse to get back into bed

# Your Pelvic Floor

## What is it and where do I find it?

The pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles that stretch from the pubic bone at the front, to your tailbone at the back.



## What does it do?

The muscles act like a “sling” or a “hammock” and literally make up the “floor” of your pelvis. These muscles help to support the bladder, uterus and the bowel; they prevent any leakage from your bladder or bowel; they assist in pushing the baby’s head down the birth canal during birth; and they help make sex more enjoyable.

## How do I make these muscles work?

Imagine you are trying to stop the flow of urine, or prevent wind from passing. When you squeeze these muscles, you should feel an “upwards” movement. You should not feel your bottom or thighs tightening.

## How can I check that I am doing the right movement?

Next time you go to the toilet, try to stop the flow of urine midway through emptying the bladder. If the flow of urine stops or slows down – then you are doing it right! However, while this is a good way to help you find the correct muscles, it is not recommended to do this ongoing as it can lead to other problems.

## So why is my pelvic floor important?

During pregnancy and childbirth the pelvic floor muscles are stretched and weakened, and this puts you at an increased risk of developing urinary incontinence. It has been shown that one in three women who have ever had a baby will suffer from urinary leakage. But don't worry – regular pelvic floor exercises have been proven to be effective in strengthening these muscles.



## Ok, so I found the right muscles and I know they are important – now what?

Start exercising your pelvic floor muscles! This exercise can safely be started 1-2 days following birth and is safe to do even if you have stitches, providing it does not increase your pain.

1. Find a **comfortable position**. You may find lying or sitting easier to start with. Once your muscles become stronger, you can do this exercise in any position.
2. **"Squeeze and lift"** your pelvic floor muscles as strongly as you can, as though you were trying to stop yourself from passing wind.
3. Try and hold the contraction for **3-10 seconds**. Ensure that your buttock and thigh muscles remain relaxed and that you continue to breathe normally.
4. Following the contraction, **relax** your pelvic floor muscles for about **5 seconds**
5. Repeat the exercise **3 – 5 times**
6. Attempt to do this exercise at least **4 times a day** or possibly every time you feed your baby

Following childbirth you may find that you can hardly feel any movement when doing the exercise, but keep persisting as these muscles will get stronger with time and practice.



As the muscles get stronger you can make the exercise more challenging by holding the contraction for longer, or doing additional repetitions. But remember **quality over quantity** – so stop exercising once the muscles are tired.

## **Is there anything else I can do to help protect my pelvic floor?**

Yes, it is important to have a healthy bladder and bowel habits to avoid constipation and additional straining on your pelvic floor when going to the toilet.

### **So remember to:**

1. Drink between 1.5 and 2 litres of water each day
2. Avoid drinking too much caffeine and alcohol as this can make you dehydrated
3. Eat plenty of high fibre foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables. Kiwifruit, prune, pear and apple juices are natural laxatives
4. Exercise regularly – walking is particularly good in the first six weeks.
5. Don't ignore urges to empty your bowel. Anywhere from three times per day to three times per week are within normal limits
6. Avoid constipation and straining as this weakens your pelvic floor and may cause haemorrhoids, anal fissures and prolapses
7. Take time when emptying your bladder and bowel
8. Sit correctly on the toilet to avoid straining



## Best toilet position to avoid straining

- Sit, leaning forward with your elbows on your knees, and allow your tummy to relax
- Use a foot stool, or lift your heels up of the floor so that your knees are above your hips.
- Make a fist and blow into it or make a hissing sound. Do not hold your breath
- Support your stitches with your hand or your sanitary pad, particularly when opening your bowels



## Taking care of your back



Your deep abdominal muscles help you to maintain good posture and support your back. During your pregnancy these muscles stretch and their efficiency is reduced. It is important to regain the strength in these muscles after the birth to prevent back pain.

## Useful exercise to strengthen your abdominal muscles

1. You can do this exercise lying on your back with your knees bent up, or kneeling on your hands and knees
2. Gently tighten your lower abdominal muscles by pulling your lower tummy towards your spine
3. Hold for 2-5 seconds, whilst breathing normally
4. Repeat 6-10 times, 4 times a day



## Tips for back care and correct lifting technique

- Bend your knees, keep your back straight and always tighten your pelvic floor and your tummy muscles
- Avoid sudden & repetitive bending and twisting movements
- Ensure your working surfaces are at waist height, especially for bathing and changing your baby
- Ensure you are in a supportive position for feeding. Place your bottom back in the chair, support your feet (either on the floor or on a foot stool) and use support such as a pillow to bring baby up to your breast.



## Return to exercise

- Commence gentle walking as pain and discomfort allows
- Gradually increase your walking distance and speed as able
- Avoid strenuous and high impact exercise during the first 12 weeks following the birth of your baby

If you require any additional information or would like to see a women's health physiotherapist, please feel free to contact:

Women's Health Physiotherapist  
Therapies Department  
Hutt Hospital

Phone number: 566 6999 extension 9416

