

RECOVERING FROM YOUR CAESAREAN



Following the birth of your baby it is important for you to be as fit and healthy as possible in order to meet the demands of being a parent. This handout was put together by the physiotherapy department and contains some information to help you look after your body following a caesarean delivery.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR LUNGS

After a caesarean it is important to do some breathing exercises to keep your lungs clear of mucous and working well. This is because the anaesthetic/epidural that you were given before your caesarean affects how well you breathe.

The following breathing exercise should be done every hour.

- Sit up straight
- Take a slow, deep breath in. Keep your shoulders relaxed and let the bottom of your lungs expand.
- Repeat 10 times
- Follow your set of deep breaths with a good strong cough. Some gentle pressure over your wound can make this more comfortable.

CIRCULATION

During the first few days following the birth of your baby you may spend more time in bed than usual. While you are not as mobile it is important to exercise your legs regularly to minimise the risk of blood clots and varicose veins. To do this, pump your ankles up and down 10 times every hour.

BED MOBILITY

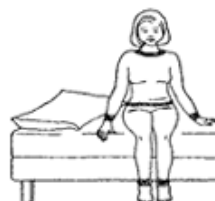
Getting in and out of bed may be a little uncomfortable after a caesarean. Try the following technique:

To get out of bed:

- Roll on to your side
- Keeping your legs together lower them off the edge of the bed
- Push yourself up into sitting with your arms

To get in to bed:

- Sit on the edge of the bed
- Lower yourself on to your side
- Roll on to your back



WALKING

Walking is the safest form of exercise following a caesarean. Getting up and about as soon as possible will help prevent complications like chest infections and blood clots, and will speed up your recovery.

Many women can feel light-headed and dizzy the first time they get out of bed so it is important to have someone with you for your safety. When you get up for the first time it is a good idea to stand on the spot for about 10-20 seconds to let your body adjust to being upright.

To assist your wound healing it is important to stand as upright as possible. This can be uncomfortable in the first few days so it is important to take adequate pain relief.

GETTING BACK INTO EXERCISE

Begin your return to exercise by walking. Slowly increase the amount of walking you do and start out on flat surfaces before adding in hills. Bear in mind that you may tire more easily than usual- listen to your body and don't push yourself.

Low impact exercise can generally be commenced at 6 weeks. Post-natal pilates and yoga classes are popular and can usually be started at this time. It is important to have someone supervising your form when you return to pilates or yoga to ensure that you are using the right muscles for each exercise. Before you return to swimming you need to ensure that your wound has healed and your vaginal discharge has resolved. Check this with your doctor.

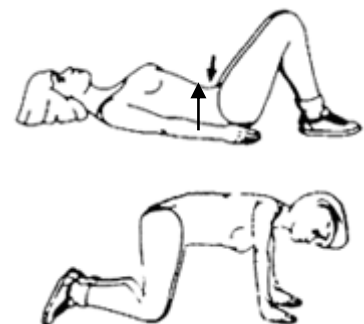
It is advisable to wait 3-4 months before returning to high impact exercise such as jogging, running and jumping activities. This is because your abdominal muscles and pelvic floor are weakened during pregnancy, and your joints have less support from your ligaments. This increases your risk of injury.

ABDOMINAL EXERCISES

Your deep abdominal muscles help to provide stability for your back and pelvis. These muscles are stretched and weakened by pregnancy. Abdominal bracing exercises will help improve the strength and endurance of your deep abdominal muscles. You can usually begin these exercises three or four days after your baby is born.

- Relax your abdominal muscles, let your tummy sag
- Take a deep breath in
- As you *breathe out*, pull your belly button towards your spine. Make sure your back and pelvis stay still as you do this.
- Try and hold for a few seconds while breathing normally and repeat 4-5 times.
- Aim to slowly increase your length of hold and number of repetitions.

Remember to use these muscles to brace your spine as you lift and carry your baby.



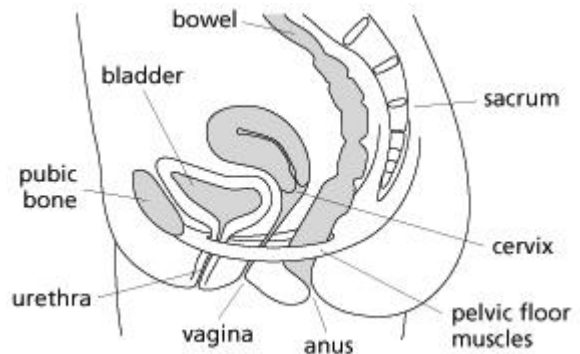
PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

The pelvic floor is a sling of muscles that runs from the tailbone at the back to the pubic bone in the front.

A strong pelvic floor is important for:

- Stopping leakage of urine when you cough/sneeze/run etc
- Helping you hold on when you need to go to the toilet
- Supporting the organs in your pelvis to prevent organ prolapse

The muscles that make up the pelvic floor are weakened during pregnancy and birth, regardless of whether you have a vaginal or caesarean delivery. The following exercise will help to strengthen your pelvic floor and can be started once your catheter has been removed.



- Imagine you are trying to stop the flow of urine or hold in wind.
- You should feel a SQUEEZE and LIFT around your vagina and back passage.

Each contraction should be held for “x” seconds.
“x” is how old your baby is in weeks.

For example:

When your baby is 0 weeks old do 10 contractions with the aim of stimulating circulation and muscle co-ordination.

When your baby is 1 week old do 10 contractions holding each contraction for 1 second each.

When your baby is 2 weeks old do 10 contractions holding each contraction for 2 seconds

And so on until your baby is 6 weeks old.

Following this time you should continue to do pelvic floor exercises 3-4 times a day aiming to be able to do:

10 contractions holding for 10 seconds and
10-20 quick squeezes.

Picking an activity such as breastfeeding or changing baby and using this as a reminder to do your pelvic floor exercises can be useful. Try to exercise your pelvic floor 3-4 times a day and remember to turn on your pelvic floor when you cough, sneeze, lift baby etc.

REGAINING GOOD BLADDER FUNCTION

For the first 24 hours or so following your caesarean you will have a catheter- this tube runs into your bladder and continually drains your urine so that you don't need to go to the toilet. Once the catheter has been removed the nursing staff will do a trial of void, where they measure 3 urine volumes. Your bladder can have reduced sensation and tone post pregnancy so it is important to void regularly and ensure you are emptying your bladder completely. It can take around 2 weeks for normal function to return. Some women also find that it takes a few moments before the flow starts, or that the flow is slower than normal. The following tips can help your bladder function return to normal:

- Drink water to thirst- try and have a glass of water each hour.
- Limit your caffeine intake.
- You should empty your bladder every 2-3 hours, whether you feel like you need to or not. During the night, void when your baby gets up to feed.
- You should be passing at least 200-300mls each time you pass urine and not over 700mls. If your passing a lot less than 200mls or more than 700mls, let your midwife or physiotherapist know.
- Sit well back on the toilet and relax your stomach to help your bladder empty. Some gentle support over your wound may make this more comfortable.

GOOD BOWEL HABITS

A lot of women have difficulty passing a bowel motion following the birth of their baby. It is important that your bowel motions are soft but well formed and that you avoid straining.

The following tips can make passing bowel motions more comfortable and less scary!

- Eat high fibre foods such as wholegrains, fruit and vegetables. Dietary fibre helps your stool to hold moisture, which keeps it soft and easier to pass.
- Drink plenty of water- this helps dietary fibre to work properly. If you don't drink enough fluid your stool may be drier and more difficult to pass.
- Fibre supplements/Stool softeners/laxatives: if your bowels haven't opened in 48 hours or if you are having difficulties passing a bowel motion then speak to your midwife about taking a supplement to assist you.

Try this position to help prevent straining:



- Place your feet on a footstool/telephone directory so that your knees are higher than your hips
- Lean forward and place your elbows on your knees
- BULGE your tummy out. Some gentle support over your wound may make this more comfortable.
- WAIT for the stool to descend- don't try and force it out.

BACK CARE AND POSTURE

With a new baby to care for you will need to do a lot of bending and lifting. Both these actions can lead to back pain if not performed with care. Getting into some good habits early on will reduce your risk of back injury.

- Maintain the natural curves of your spine.
- Avoid bending forward- make sure change tables/baby baths are at waist height rather than hip height.
- Keep baby close to you when lifting and holding them.
- Remember to brace your abdominal muscles when lifting and carrying your baby.
- Bend from your hips rather than your back and use your leg muscles to take the load.

Ideally you should avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby for the first six weeks. If you have a toddler, encourage them to climb up on your lap for cuddles rather than picking them up while standing.

BREAST-FEEDING

Spending a few minutes adjusting your posture at the start of each feed will reduce your risk of postural aches and pains:

- Choose a chair that gives firm support to your back
- Hips and knees should be at right angles with your feet flat on the floor. A small stool/yellow pages may be useful.
- A rolled up towel can provide good support to your lower back.
- Keep your shoulders down and back- try not to slouch with round shoulders.
- Bring baby to breast, not breast to baby.