

RUH

Patient Information – regaining your fitness after giving birth



This information sheet gives you some useful tips and exercises to help you get back into shape and keep healthy

Day One: after a caesarean

If you have had a caesarean birth, you need to take extra care to protect the cut in your tummy while it heals.

Breathing exercises

Take three or four deep breaths hourly to help keep the chest clear, improve circulation and aid relaxation.



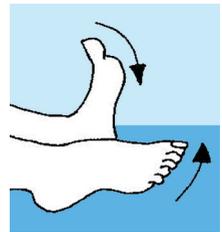
Coughing

If you need to cough, sit up in bed with knees bent, or sit in a chair. Support your wound with your hands or a pillow. Take a breath in and cough or huff to clear your chest.

Day One: exercises for all

Foot exercises

With your legs supported, move your feet briskly up and down from the ankle for 30 seconds every hour to help your circulation, particularly if you have swollen ankles.



Getting in and out of bed

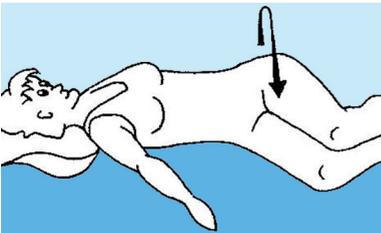
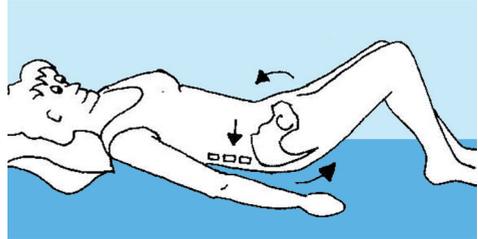
To get out of bed, bend your knees up, roll onto your side and push up with your hands. Reverse the movement to get back into bed.

Day Two

Start all the exercises lying on your back with your knees bent. You will probably feel more comfortable with a pillow under your head. Practise daily for six weeks. Begin with five repetitions and increase at your own rate.

Pelvic tilting

Pull your tummy in gently, rock your hips backwards and flatten your back into the bed. Hold and then let go slowly. Make sure you are working your tummy muscles and not just pushing with your feet.



Knee rolling

First pelvic tilt as above and then roll your knees from side to side, keeping your shoulders on the bed. Increase the range of movement gradually.

Tummy exercise

Place your hand flat on the lower part of your tummy. Breathe in through your nose. As you breathe out gently draw in your tummy away from your hand towards your back, then relax.

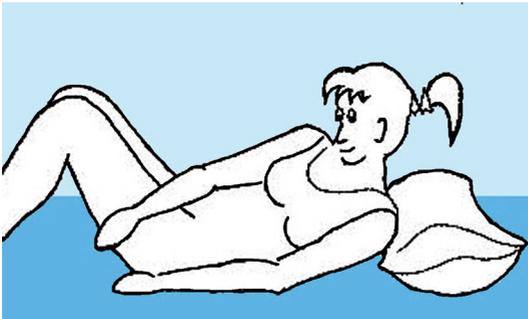
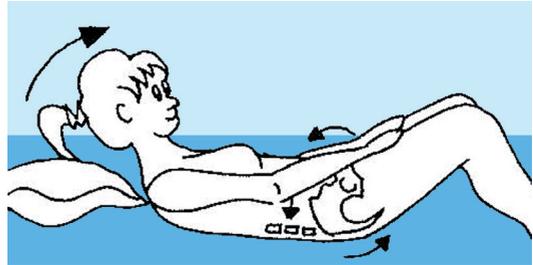
To progress, repeat as above but hold your muscles in while you continue to breathe in and out for up to ten seconds. Feel the muscles working. This exercise can also be done sitting down (feeding the baby) as well as standing up. Practise it often during the day. When you feel comfortable, do the exercise every day when moving about, holding your tummy in firmly.

Progressive exercises

The following two exercises will strengthen your tummy muscles further. But if your tummy bulges out excessively with these exercises, go back to the Day Two exercises and try again in a few days' time.

Head and shoulder lifting

Flatten your tummy and back, place your hands halfway up your thighs. Lift your head and shoulders up slightly whilst looking at the ceiling and slide your hands towards your knees. Return slowly to the start position. Progress by increasing the repetitions and removing the pillow from under your head.



Diagonals

Flatten your tummy and back. Raise your head and right shoulder and reach across your left thigh towards your lower leg. Return slowly to the start position. Repeat for the left side. Progress by

increasing the repetitions and removing the pillow from under your head.

Pelvic floor exercises

These muscles help to prevent leakage from the bladder or bowel. Practising gently after delivery of your baby can help to reduce the vaginal swelling and discomfort. When you feel comfortable, start exercising more strongly:

- Tighten your front and back passages and lift the muscles up inside (imagine you are stopping passing urine midstream or preventing wind from escaping).
- Hold for as long as you can (for several seconds in due course).
- Relax slowly, rest for a few seconds and repeat the exercise several times.
- Now tighten strongly and then quickly release the same muscles five or six times.

Do these exercises in any comfortable position – lying, sitting, when feeding your baby, sitting on the toilet (after you have emptied your bladder) or standing (washing up, ironing, waiting for the bus or in a supermarket queue).

If you want to test the strength of your muscles, try and stop passing urine mid-stream. Only do this occasionally, not every time you pass urine.

If you have any problem with urine or bowel leakage, consult your GP or obstetric physiotherapist.

Remember to do your pelvic floor exercises several times a day FOREVER.

Looking after your back



You need to be relaxed and comfortable to feed. Make sure your back, neck and baby are well supported with pillows or cushions.

Avoid heavy lifting for four to six weeks after the birth.

Always bend your knees and keep your back straight when you lift things. Hold heavy objects, including toddlers, close to you and avoid twisting as you lift.

You should always take care of your back but remember it is especially vulnerable for 3-4 months after your baby is born.

Rest

Mothers often feel tired after birth. Rest whenever possible, using relaxation to help you unwind and go to sleep. Accept any offers of help with domestic chores. Use this time to look after yourself and the baby.

Sport

Continue to do the exercises in this leaflet for at least six weeks,

gradually increasing the number of repetitions. Try to join a postnatal group near where you live.

It is advisable to wait until after your six week check before returning to sporting activities. Listen to your body. Go at your own pace and stop if it hurts.

Swimming is an excellent way to regain overall fitness and to tone up muscles. Avoid high-impact, contact or competitive sports for at least three months after the birth.

Sex

Resume sexual intercourse when you feel ready and comfortable. If you experience discomfort please contact your GP or obstetric physiotherapist for help.

Contact details

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