

# PHYSIOTHERAPY POSTNATAL EXERCISE & ADVICE:

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the physiotherapy department is closed to one on one appointments.

Please feel free to ring 01 817 1787 for advice or check out the Rotunda Hospital website for on line resources, including our postnatal pelvic floor and core class.

## IMMEDIATE CARE FOLLOWING DELIVERY

**Rest** is important to help with your recovery. Rest on your back or side to minimise discomfort, reduce swelling and take weight off your pelvic floor/abdomen. If your perineum is sore when sitting, put a rolled towel or small pillow under each thigh and buttock so that your perineum is not in contact with the chair. Ring cushions are not advisable as they cause the swelling to localise around the perineum.

### Getting out of bed

Gently pull your lower tummy in. Bend your knees and roll onto your side. Slide your feet over the edge of the bed. Push yourself up to sitting using your elbow and hand.

### Getting into bed

Gently pull your lower tummy in. Sit your bottom down square on the bed lower your head and shoulders onto the pillow. At the same time lift your legs up onto the bed.



### Circulation Exercises

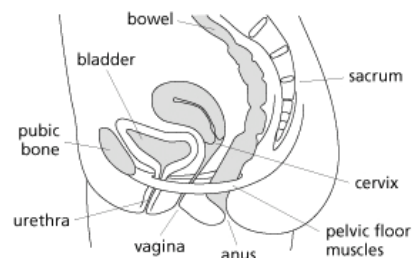
Move your feet forwards and back and around in circles 20 times every hour while resting in bed.



**Pelvic floor and deep abdominal exercises** help you return to your pre-pregnancy shape and will help with healing of stitches. They can be safely started 1-2 days following the delivery of your baby, provided there is no increase in your pain.

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**Pelvic floor muscles** are very important as they control the bladder and bowel. During pregnancy they become weakened due to pregnancy hormones and the extra weight of your baby. It is important for all women whether they have a vaginal or caesarean delivery to strengthen their pelvic floor muscles. Do them 3 times a day to get best results.



To begin with, lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet hip width apart.

### Quick holds

Quickly tighten the pelvic floor muscles and hold for a second before letting go fully. Repeat 5 times in a row. Repeat 3 times a day. Gradually increase your repetitions until you can do 20 quick squeezes in a row, it may take a few months to be able to do this.

### Long holds

Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor. Starting at the back passage, squeeze as if you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and urine. You may feel your lower tummy tighten gently. Hold for 3 seconds, keep your whole tummy, buttocks and thigh muscles relaxed and breathe normally.

Relax completely for 3 seconds. Repeat this exercise 5 times. Repeat 3 times a day. As your pelvic floor muscles get stronger, practise in sitting and standing. Gradually increase the length of time and number of repetitions until you can do a 10 second hold 10 times. Always stop exercising when the muscle tires.

**The Knack** Quickly squeeze and hold your pelvic floor muscles BEFORE coughing, sneezing, laughing and when lifting your baby. This will give you more control of your bladder and will retrain your muscles.

## Healthy bladder and bowel habits

You SHOULD empty your bladder within 6 hours of your delivery, if you are having difficulty emptying your bladder or no urge to go, talk to your midwife.

Drink 1.5- 2 litres of fluid during the day (water is preferable to tea and coffee which may irritate your bladder). Eat plenty of high fibre foods (e.g. fruits, vegetables)

Don't ignore urges to empty your bowel in the first few weeks. For comfort when opening your bowels, hold some folded toilet paper over your stitches in front of your back passage. If you had a caesarean section, support your tummy with your hands or a folded towel.

Avoid straining – take your time to completely empty. Sit leaning forward, with your elbows on your knees, let your tummy relax. Use a foot stool or lift your heels up off the floor so that your knees are above your hips. Don't hold your breath.



### 1. Deep Abdominal muscle exercises

Abdominal muscles are important for back support and in maintaining good posture. During pregnancy, your abdominal muscles stretched and became weakened.

Lie on your back, knees bent and feet hip distance apart.

**Breathe in:** let your tummy rise. **Breathe out:** gently tighten your lower abdominal muscles by pulling your lower belly in towards your spine (as if getting into tight trousers).

Keep your upper abdominal muscles relaxed throughout the exercise, breathe normally. Hold the position for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times, 3 times a day.

Gently pull in your deep abdominal muscles during activities like lifting your baby and walking. As you get stronger, you can do the exercise in sitting, on all fours and when standing. Gradually increase the hold time up to 60 seconds



### 2. Knee rolls (start as in exercise 1.)

Tighten your lower abdominal muscles, slowly lower both knees to the right as far as is comfortable. Use your tummy muscles to slowly bring your knees back to the middle and relax there. Repeat to the left.

Repeat 3 times each side, 3 times a day.

Slowly increase your repetitions till you can do 10 each side.

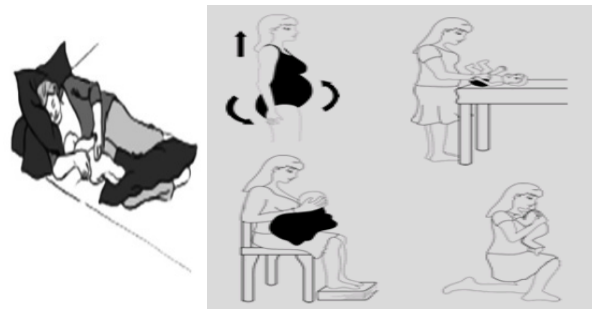
### 3. Pelvic tilts (start as in exercise 1.)

Tighten your lower tummy and flatten your lower back into the bed. Hold for 5-10 seconds and let go. Repeat 10 times.

**Following a Caesarean section** The above exercises are helpful in relieving wind discomfort. When coughing firmly support your stitches with your hands or pillow. If you are in bed bend up your knees.

For the first 6 weeks avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby, including housework or other strenuous activity.

**Back Care** When lifting, bend your knees, keep your back straight and always tighten your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles. Hold the object firmly and close to your body. Make sure your work surfaces are at waist height (e.g. bathing & changing the baby). Create a supportive position for feeding. Sit well back in the chair, make sure your feet are supported and use pillows help lift the baby up to your breast or lie on your side.



Start gentle walking as pain/discomfort allows. Gradually increase your distance then your speed up to 30 minute walk each day. You can start swimming when you have had 7 days in a row free from vaginal bleeding or discharge or at 6 weeks following a c-section. Wait at least 3 months to return to heavy exercises, running or lifting. Use your deep tummy muscles when attempting more difficult exercises. Your tummy should not bulge out with any exercise and we advise caution with sit-ups.

**If you have any leakage from your bladder or bowel, or persistent pain with intercourse, contact the physiotherapy department for advice on 01 8171787.**

Have a look at our videos on [www.rotunda.ie](http://www.rotunda.ie) .

Women's Health After Motherhood is an online 4 module free course co designed with the Rotunda staff. <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/womens-health-after-motherhood>

Topics covered: maternal health, physical health including urinary incontinence, mental and sexual health.