



Bereavement

Postnatal Information

For Parents Whose Baby Has Died



We wish to offer our sympathy to you and your family on the death of your baby. The death of a baby is one of the most painful experiences imaginable. Finding out that your baby has died at any stage during the pregnancy comes as an enormous shock to parents. We will try to help and support you through this difficult time. We have written this booklet to provide you with some practical information to help you in the weeks after the delivery of your baby.

Postnatal exercises and advice from the physiotherapists

We would like to help you with any physical symptoms you may be struggling with at this time. These exercises can help make you more mobile and comfortable if you do some gently each day. If you are experiencing back or pelvic pain, or any problems with bladder or bowel control, please phone for an individual appointment by phoning 01 817 1787 or email physiotherapy@rotunda.ie.

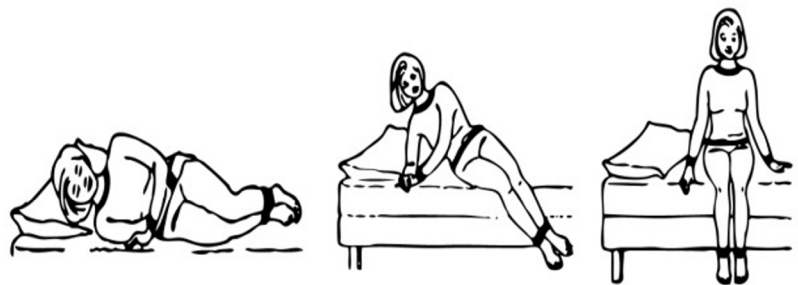
Immediate care following delivery

Rest is important to help with your recovery. Rest on your back or side to minimise discomfort, reduce swelling and to take weight off your pelvic floor and /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 recommended as they can cause the swelling to localise around the perineum.

Getting out of bed

Gently breathe out and tighten your lower tummy muscles. 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 breathe out and tighten your lower tummy muscles. Sit your bottom down square on the bed and then 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.

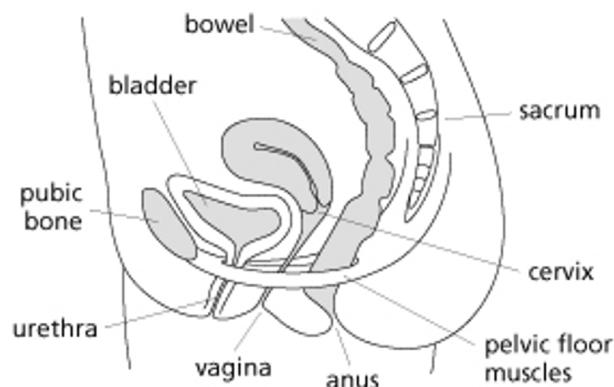


Exercises for your pelvic floor muscles

Pelvic floor and deep abdominal exercises help you return to your pre-pregnancy shape and will help with healing of stitches. These can be safely started 1-2 days following the delivery, provided there is no increase in your pain. You can do these after a vaginal birth or caesarean section.

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 you carry. It is important for all women whether they have a vaginal or caesarean delivery to strengthen their pelvic floor muscles.

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

Breathe in and relax your muscles. As you gently breathe out, 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, practice 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 light weights. This will give you more control of your bladder and will retrain your muscles. To be effective you need to do your pelvic floor muscle training 3 times a day.

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 have 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 any stitches in your perineum (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, and let your tummy relax. Use a footstool 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.

Pull in your deep abdominal muscles during activities like lifting light weights, standing from sitting, 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.

Exercises 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 a kettle of water, including housework or other strenuous activity.

Back care

When lifting, bend your knees, keep your back straight and always breathe out as you 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.

Start gentle walking as pain/discomfort allows; gradually increase your distance and then your speed up to a 30 minute walk each day. You can start swimming when you have had 7 days in a row free from vaginal bleeding or discharge. Wait 3 months to return to heavy exercises, running or weight 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 doing sit-ups.

Sexual intercourse

If you are not experiencing any problems you can start as soon as you feel ready. Choose a comfortable position, use lubrication and start gently.

If you have any leakage from your bladder or bowel, or persistent pain with intercourse, contact the physiotherapy department by phoning **(01) 817 1787** or email physiotherapy@rotunda.ie. You can self refer up to 6 months after delivery. Have a look at our videos on www.rotunda.ie/physio/#resources You may find the following gentle grief recovery exercise video helpful www.fit2b.us/grief-routine/

Pain relief

Paracetamol and ibuprofen are recommended for pain relief after discharge from hospital.

Both are available over the counter without prescription from your local pharmacy. 1 gram Paracetamol can be taken 4-6 hourly, up to a maximum of 4 doses in 24 hours. 400mg Ibuprofen can be taken 8 hourly, up to a maximum of 3 doses in 24 hours. It is best to take Ibuprofen with food to reduce any possible stomach upset. Speak to your doctor or midwife if you have a history of stomach ulcers, asthma, or if you are allergic to any medications.

Breast care following the loss of your baby

As this is a very difficult time emotionally, it is important that any physical pain you may experience from breast fullness is dealt with appropriately. When you have lost a baby you may still experience some breast fullness and tenderness. You may also produce milk, but this should only last a short period of time by following the correct advice.

Engorgement of the breasts:

Your breasts may become swollen, tender and hard between two and five days after delivery. Breasts may feel uncomfortable and leak some milk for up to 7-14 days.

- Take regular pain relief (anti-inflammatories)
- Wear a bra that provides good support and avoid underwire bras
- Use breast pads to absorb any leaking milk
- Use cold compresses on your breasts
- Apply washed and chilled cabbage leaves to the breast and replace these regularly
- Avoid hot showers/shower jets directly on your breast. Use a warm or cold shower whichever is more comfortable and eases the engorgement for you
- Sleep in a semi-upright position to ease the pressure from heavy breasts

Reducing your milk supply:

If you have been expressing milk for some time and have established a milk supply, it's important to reduce your milk supply slowly. This will ensure you do not experience undue pain and discomfort from blocked ducts or mastitis.

It's important that you respond to your body and only hand express or pump for comfort. Suggested guidance to assist with this:

Day 1: Hand express/pump each breast for 5 minutes every 4-5 hours.

Day 2: Hand express/pump each breast for 3-5 minutes every 6 hours.

Day 3 - 7: Hand express/pump each breast just long enough to relieve any discomfort.

Milk donation:

If you wish to donate your breast milk contact Enniskillen Human Milk Bank in Northern Ireland directly yourself by phoning +44 48 68628333. Milk banks use donated milk for sick and premature babies.

You can also speak to the Lactation Consultant in the Rotunda and she can arrange for you to have the appropriate blood tests completed.

You may like to consider having 'breast milk jewellery' made from some of your expressed milk. Further information is available on <https://preciousbykerry.com> or helenhancockglass.com. If you are interested in this option you need to freeze your breast milk at home so that you can consider this at a later date.

On the morning of the funeral:

- If your breasts feel very full or hard, hand express or use the breast pump a little to ease the discomfort before you go out
- Wear breast pads in your bra to absorb any leakage
- Wear a patterned top or blouse to camouflage any leaking milk
- At the funeral, if standing, place one arm across your breasts to protect sore breasts when hugging. Offer the other arm. Where possible sit down when hugging as there is less pressure on the breasts

When to seek further advice:

You may have an infection in your breasts if you:

- Feel very uncomfortable and your breasts appear red, tender or hot to touch
- Have flu-like symptoms or your temperature is over 38°C
- If you feel unwell and experience any of the above, please contact your Lactation Consultant, midwife or doctor

On the day of discharge from hospital

A full postnatal check will be done and you will receive any prescriptions required.

An appropriate and individualised plan for follow up care will be provided to you. Usually this includes a 6 week postnatal check up with your GP or consultant. A discharge letter will be sent to your GP if you have had a stillbirth or a neonatal death your public health nurse will also be informed and will contact you.

Contraception

Following the birth of your baby you might want to consider contraception options as ovulation occurs before menstruation, making pregnancy possible. We acknowledge this can be a difficult topic to discuss following the death of your baby. Scan the QR code for the HSE's website with information on all your options for contraception. Staff are also happy to discuss this further with you. Please discuss with your GP or local family planning clinic either.



Medical attention

Pain that gets progressively worse despite regular pain relief, or is accompanied by a high temperature, heavier or foul-smelling vaginal discharge or blood loss needs medical attention. You can contact the Emergency and Assessment Unit for advice by phoning [01 817 1700](tel:018171700) or just attend for review.

Other symptoms that warrant medical attention include

- Headache not relieved by paracetamol, good hydration and rest
- Chest pain or shortness of breath
- Temperature 38°C or above even without any other symptoms

Improving the quality of the service we provide

Our aim is to provide you with the best possible care and service we can at such a difficult time for you and your family. If we can provide you with any additional information or help, please do not hesitate to ask.

Support information

A Little Lifetime Foundation	www.alittlelifetime.ie
Ectopic Pregnancy Ireland	www.ectopicireland.ie
Féileacáin	www.feileacain.ie (085) 249 6464
Irish Childhood Bereavement Network	www.childhoodbereavement.ie
Miscarriage Association of Ireland	www.miscarriage.ie
Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep	www.nilmdts.org (083) 377 4777
HSE Website	www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie
Treasured Keepsakes	www.treasuredkeepsakes.ie
Twins and Multiple Birth Association	www.twinstrust.org/bereavement.html

These organisations provide support and some services to parents and families. Their full contact details are available on their websites. Other organisations are also available and may be found online.

Useful Contact Details

Bereavement Support Midwife Trish Butler Carol Rock	01 817 1700 (Bleep 777) 087 682 2639 bereavement@rotunda.ie
Assistant Director of Midwifery	01 817 1700 (Bleep 350) (out of hours support)
Hospital Chaplain Ann Charlton	01 817 1700 (Bleep 334) acharlton@rotunda.ie
Social Worker Bereavement	01 817 1722
Birth Reflections	087 371 0313 birthreflections@rotunda.ie
Mental Health Services	01 817 2541
Rotunda's Birth Notification Office	01 817 1726
Rotunda's website	www.rotunda.ie
Glasnevin Trust (Includes Glasnevin, Dardistown & Newlands Cross)	01 882 6500 www.glasnevintrust.ie
Glasnevin Monument Works	01 882 6520
Mount Jerome	01 497 1269 www.mountjerome.ie medref@mountjerome.ie
Kirwan Funeral Directors	01 833 4444 www.kirwans.ie/fairview

