

## Postnatal Physiotherapy Advice

### 1. Breathing Exercises

This exercise helps to open the lower parts of your lungs which may have been restricted while you were pregnant.

- Sit upright.
- Practice normal relaxed breathing. Place your hand on your tummy and you should feel your hand gently rising and falling as you breathe in and out.
- Now take a **deep** breath in and hold for a count of 3 then breathe out gently. Repeat 4 times then return to normal breathing.

### 2. Coughing

- Sit upright.
- Support underneath using a sanitary towel or pad of toilet tissue.
- If comfort allows, squeeze your pelvic floor muscles.
- Cough and clear any secretions from your chest.

If you are not sure about your pelvic floor muscles, please see instructions further on (no. 4) in this leaflet.

### 3. Circulation

- Whilst you are resting in bed, it is important to pump your feet up and down at the ankle vigorously every hour.
- This is to encourage the circulation in the legs as there is an increased risk of blood clots after having a baby.
- It will also help to reduce puffiness or swelling around the ankles.
- These exercises are very important if you have varicose veins.

- Remember - **do not cross your legs** as this can block the blood flow in your veins and make the swelling worse.
- If your legs feel very swollen and painful, you may need to wear stockings all the time.
- If you are worried, please ask for advice.

### 4. Pelvic floor exercises

These will help to relieve soreness, bruising or swelling and will re-strengthen the muscles around the vagina which have been stretched throughout your pregnancy and especially during labour.

They can be done **even** if you have stitches, a tear or are very sore. Doing them will help healing and encourage the return of normal feeling. The pelvic floor muscles support your abdominal contents, control your front and back passages and stop you from leaking urine.

First relax your buttocks, tummy and legs, then imagine that you are trying to stop your urine flow mid-stream and at the same time trying to stop yourself passing wind. Close and draw up the front and back passages - 'squeeze and lift'.

**DO NOT:**

- ✗ hold your breath,
- ✗ squeeze your legs together,
- ✗ tighten your buttocks,
- ✗ pull your tummy in.

**DO:**

- ✓ hold and lift as long as you can, up to 10 seconds,
- ✓ then release,
- ✓ rest (for about 4 seconds),
- ✓ repeat as many times as you can, up to 10 repetitions,
- ✓ now do up to 10 short, sharp, contractions.

Perform this section as often as you can, at least morning and evening. It takes about 3 months to get the muscles strong.

**DO THEM FOREVER!**

## 5. Stitches

If your scar is still painful after 6 weeks (e.g. when opening your bowels or if making love), you may benefit from physiotherapy.

- Massaging this area as soon as your stitches have healed with KY jelly or Vaseline will help to soften any scar tissues.
- If you are concerned, mention it to your midwife, doctor, health visitor, or ring the Obstetric Physiotherapist Department.

## 6. Bowels

- If you have had stitches, you may be anxious about opening your bowels.
- To relieve any pressure, support your stitches with a sanitary towel or pad of toilet tissue held firmly against them as you open your bowels.
- Try to avoid any delay as this may lead to constipation.
- Try to avoid constipation as this will increase the pressure on your pelvic floor.
- Remember to drink plenty of fluids and to eat a healthy diet including plenty of fruit and vegetables.

## 7. Piles

- These can be very painful, so remember to take regular pain relief.
- Lying on your tummy, with a pillow under your hips, can relieve symptoms.
- Cold compresses to the area can be very soothing.
- Herbal remedies can also provide relief.

## 8. Post natal exercises

### Abdominal muscles exercises

Lie on the bed with your knees bent. Tighten your tummy muscles and flatten the small of your back against the bed. Count to 3 then let go. Repeat 5 times, twice a day.

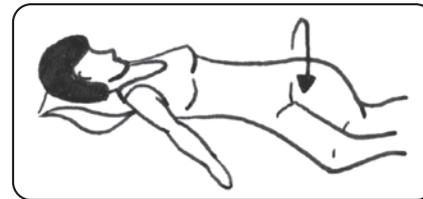


### Additional exercise after 48 hours

If you notice a 'peak' or a 'bulge' of your tummy muscles on straining forwards, do not do the following exercises but consult your Obstetric Physiotherapist.

### Knee rolling

Lie with both knees bent and feet together with your arms out to the side and your shoulders flat on the bed. Tighten your tummy muscles then roll your buttocks and knees towards one side of



the bed as far as comfort allows. Bring your knees back to the middle then repeat towards the left.

**The rocking and rolling of the two exercises above can help to relieve back ache.**

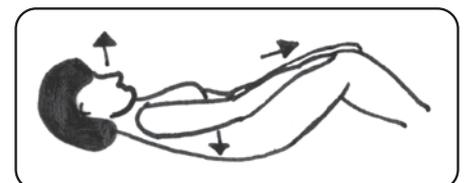
### Hip hitching

Lie on your back with your legs straight. Hitch one hip up at the waist to make your leg seem shorter. Relax. Repeat on the other side.

**The following are stronger exercises and should only be started at around 6 weeks.**

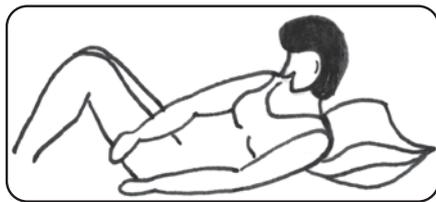
### Head raising

- Flatten your tummy and back, place your hands half way up your thighs. Lift your head and shoulders up slightly and, whilst



looking up at the ceiling, slide your hands towards your knees. Return slowly to your starting position.

- You may vary this exercise by lifting your head and right shoulder and reaching across to your left thigh then repeating the exercise towards the opposite side.



- Follow the head raising exercise but keep your arms straight by your sides throughout the exercise. Keep your tummy flat and curl up slowly.
- To work the muscles even harder, keep your arms crossed over your chest as you curl up.

### Rules of exercise

- Stop if it hurts.
- Stop if you are tired.
- Don't do them if you feel unwell.
- **Do not** attempt to do 'sit ups' or 'double leg lifts' at any time, as these could injure your back and they put excessive strain on your pelvic floor.

### Rest

This is so important, to make up for lost sleep and help your body return to normal.

## 9. General Advice

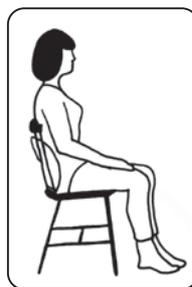
### Sport

- Avoid more strenuous exercise until about 12 weeks and until you have good control of your pelvic floor muscles.
- Your pelvic floor muscles have had quiet a stretch so avoid heavy lifting for at least 3 months.

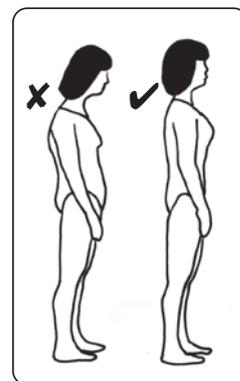
- To check the pelvic floor muscles are working well, jump up and down 5 times with a full bladder and cough at the same time to see if you are leaking urine.
- If this test is unsuccessful, you may benefit from seeing an obstetric physiotherapist for further help and advice.
- Swimming is a good and safe exercise and can be started as soon as you are healed and there is no vaginal discharge.

### Posture, lifting and back care

- Remember to stand tall, pull in your tummy and tuck your bottom in.



- When sitting, sit well back in a chair and support your back with a cushion or a roll. Keep your feet supported on the floor or a low stool.



- Lift correctly. Bend your knees, pull in your tummy muscles and tighten your pelvic floor before you lift. When you bend down, try to bend your knees and keep your back straight to take some of the strain off your back.



*If you have any concerns or queries within the first 6 weeks regarding **physiotherapy**, please contact us on **01392 406507**. After 6 weeks, you would need to see your GP for any concerns.*

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

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