



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Advice and exercises after the birth of your baby

Issued by the physiotherapy department

building a caring future

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[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

This leaflet offers advice and exercises following the birth of your baby.

## **The benefits of the advice and exercises**

The exercises are to prevent post-operative complications and to restore tone in your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles. Doing the exercises will aid your recovery, and help your body recover after the birth.

## **The risks of not doing the exercises**

By not doing the exercises and following the advice you risk persistent problems. These are back problems, weak abdominal muscles and the possibility of bladder problems.

## **The alternatives**

Unfortunately there are no easy alternatives to doing the exercises.

## **Breathing exercises**

Breathing exercises are important following a cesarean section.

Take a deep breath in through your nose, filling your lungs as fully as possible, hold, then breathe out through your mouth.

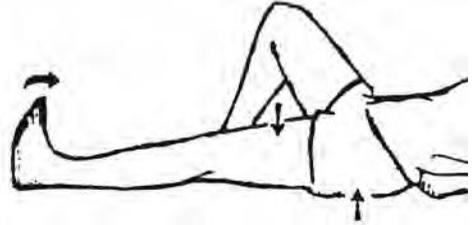
Repeat 3 times, then rest.

- Repeat this again. It will help loosen any secretions, aid circulation and ease wind.
- If you feel a "rattle" in your chest, bend up your knees (or lean forward), support your wound and try a huff (a short, forced breath out, as though you are steaming up glasses). Drawing your tummy in first will help.
- Coughing up secretions is easier if you practise deep breathing and huffing first.
- Continue with deep breathing exercises throughout the day until you are up and about as normal.

## Foot and leg exercises

### To stimulate the circulation:

- Briskly bend and stretch your ankles
- Circle your ankles
- Press your knees down into the bed and squeeze your buttocks at the same time.
- Bend and straighten your knees.



Repeat each exercise 10 times, at least 3 times a day.

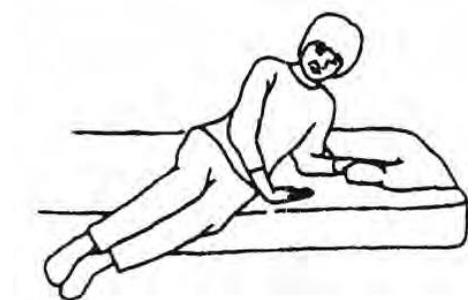
## Getting in and out of bed

You will be encouraged to get out of bed to care for your baby as soon as possible.

### To reduce strain:

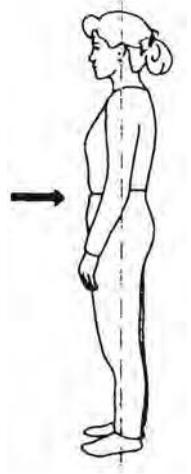
Especially following a cesarean section or for those who have abdominal separation (DRA).

- Bend your knees up one at a time.
- Keep your knees together, roll on to your side.
- Push yourself up with your arms allowing your legs to swing down towards the floor.
- Do the same in reverse to get back into bed.



## Comfort and posture

- Poor posture can aggravate pain. Try to stand tall and avoid stooping.
- Use pillows to support your back when resting and feeding.
- Try lying on your side with a pillow between your knees when resting.
- Stand and walk tall with your tummy and buttocks tucked in.
- Minimise bending and lifting.



## Abdominal exercises

For all of the following exercises use a pillow under your head and lay on your back with your knees bent and hip width apart.

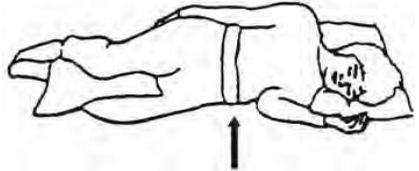
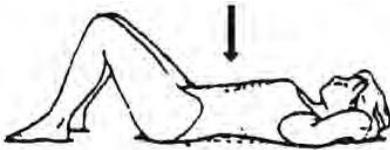
The abdominal muscles act like a corset to support the internal organs and reduce strain on the spine during everyday activity, work and sport.

If you notice any bulging of your abdomen during any of the following exercises, stop the exercise and seek help from a specialist physiotherapist.

## Tummy bracing

You can do this gentle exercise for deep muscles in any position.

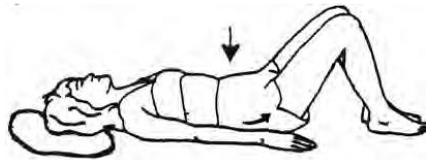
- As you breathe out, draw in the lower part of your tummy towards the spine. Keep breathing and hold for up to 10 seconds, then relax.
- Do this exercise regularly.
- Brace before moving and during activities such as lifting, pulling or pushing.



## Pelvic tilt

To ease backache and gently tone the muscles.

- Pull in your tummy, tilt your pelvis and flatten your lower back on to the bed - hold, then release slowly.
- Repeat little and often.
- A gentle rocking motion can ease backache.



## Knee rolls / to ease backache and trapped wind

- Keeping your knees together gently take your knees to one side then over to the other
- Take your knees as far as you feel comfortable without pulling on your tummy muscles

## Pelvic floor muscles

This is the sling of muscles at the floor of the pelvis which supports the pelvic organs, including your womb and baby. They help to control your bladder and bowels and may enhance sexual intercourse.

These muscles can become weakened during pregnancy. This could lead to loss of bladder control.

To help prevent this, you should exercise the pelvic floor muscles regularly. They are safe to do even with stitches. After a caesarean section you can start doing them once your catheter is removed.

To exercise these muscles:

- Squeeze and lift the muscles around the front and back passage as if stopping yourself going to the toilet.
- Hold for as many seconds as you can (up to 10), then relax. Repeat as many times as you can (up to 10).
- Next, squeeze and lift the muscles hard and fast, then relax. Repeat up to 10 times.
- Do this several times a day.

**Try to achieve a balance between rest and exercise. Practise these exercises little and often. Start gently and as any discomfort eases progress to longer and stronger holds.**

**Get into the habit of tightening your lower abdominal and pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing, lifting, pushing and pulling.**

## Progression of abdominal exercises

After 2 or 3 weeks, when you can happily manage the gentle exercises, you can progress to the following. Never strain or hold your breath.

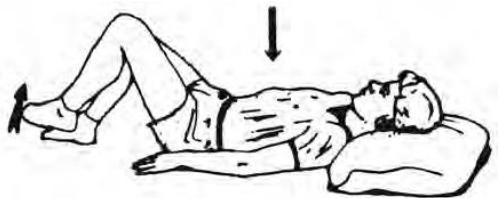
### Tummy bracing with leg slide

- Tighten the lower tummy and pelvic floor muscles to keep the back steady.
- Slowly slide one leg straight, holding the tummy tight.
- Bend the knee back up and only let the tummy relax when the leg returns to the starting position.



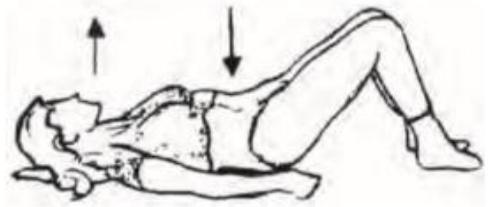
### Tummy bracing with leg lift

- Tighten the lower tummy and pelvic floor muscles to keep the back steady.
- Slowly raise one leg 10 centimetres.
- Hold for 3 or 4 seconds, then slowly lower, keeping the tummy tight.



## The head lift

- Tighten the lower tummy and pelvic floor muscles.
- Lift your head slowly, hold for a few seconds.
- Slowly lower and rest.



**Do the exercises little and often with a balance between rest and exercise.**

## Changing nappies and bathing baby

Aim to work with surfaces at waist height to avoid repeatedly bending or twisting the spine.

## Feeding

Feed in a comfortable, well supporting chair with pillows under the arms for support. Avoid hunching over when feeding your baby.

## Bowels

Some women are worried about their first bowel motion after giving birth and some women experience constipation. It is important to keep yourself hydrated and to eat a healthy diet including plenty of fibre to keep soft stools. It can also be helpful to raise your feet up on a foot stool and lean forwards keeping your back straight to make opening your bowels easier. Avoid straining and if you need to you can use a wad of toilet paper or a sanitary towel to support the area in front of your back passage to make it more comfortable.

## Caesarean Section

If you have had a caesarean section your recovery will take more time. Listen to your body and try not to do too much and accept any help that is offered. Once your scar has fully healed and the scabs have fallen off you can start using a simple moisturiser over the area and doing some gentle massage along the scar. To do this place your index and middle finger together at one end of the scar and move along the scar doing gentle circular motions the move the skin underneath.

## Scar healing

Sometimes as a result of a tear or episiotomy (cut in your perineum) you may have had to have stitches. You may have some discomfort initially but as you heal this should ease. To help try to avoid prolonged sitting and change position regularly. As your tissues heal and your scar forms it can be useful to apply some stretch to these tissues, you can do this in the bath or shower or with a water based lubricant. Use your fingertips to gently move the tissues to allow the scar to stretch and soften.

## Returning to exercise

The effects of pregnancy hormones can affect your joints for up to 6 months after delivery so be careful with high impact exercise. Brisk walking is a good way to exercise building up gradually and listening to your body. Swimming is a good form of exercise and once you have had 7 consecutive days clear from vaginal bleeding and discharge you can start. However if you have had a caesarean section you should wait until your 6 week check with the GP. If you wish to return to running it is recommended that you wait until at least 3 months after delivery and there are guidelines that have been produced that you can find online to help you to know when you are ready to return. If you have any questions please contact the physiotherapy team.

## Useful contact numbers

### **North Tyneside General Hospital**

Rake Lane

North Shields, NE29 8NH, 0344 811 8111 ext. 34064

### **Wansbeck General Hospital**

Woodhorn Lane, Ashington, NE63 9JJ, 0344 811 8111 ext. 36010

### **Hexham General Hospital**

Corbridge Road, Hexham, NE46 1QJ, 0344 811 8111 ext. 35031

### **Alnwick Infirmary**

South Road, Alnwick, NE66 2NS, 0344 811 8111 ext. 36750

### **Berwick Infirmary**

Infirmary Square, Berwick-upon-Tweed, TD15 1LT, 0344 811 8111 ext. 36643

*Illustrations courtesy of Physio Tools*



## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 01670 511098

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)



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