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**Ashford Hospital**  
London Road  
Ashford, Middlesex  
TW15 3AA  
Tel: **01784 884488**

**St. Peter's Hospital**  
Guildford Road  
Chertsey, Surrey  
KT16 0PZ.  
Tel: **01932 872000**

Website: [www.ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk](http://www.ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk)

# Postnatal Exercises

## Women's Health

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## Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email [pals@asph.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@asph.nhs.uk). If you still remain concerned please contact our Complaints Manager on 01932 722612 or email [complaints@asph.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints@asph.nhs.uk).

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**Author:** L Tranter

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

If, during the first six weeks following the birth, you have any concerns about your back or pelvic floor which you have not had before, please ask your community midwife, health visitor or GP to refer you to the women's health physiotherapist.

Alternatively phone:

Ashford Hospital **01784 884484**

St. Peters Hospital **01932 722547**

The following websites may be helpful:

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

The association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Women's Health

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

## Postnatal Exercises

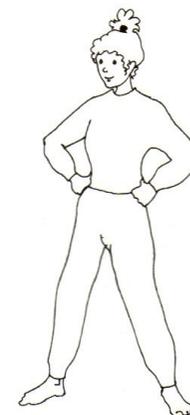
This booklet is only intended to support the advice given by your obstetric physiotherapist.

Start as soon as you can – within 24 hours of the birth will achieve best results.

The exercises are gentle, not harmful and very quickly will help to put you back on the road to fitness.

You will need to exercise:-

- Your abdominal muscles
  - to help to regain your figure and prevent or reduce any back ache
- Your pelvic floor muscles
  - To reduce the risk of any future problems with incontinence and prolapse



### PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

It is important to begin this exercise as soon as possible although discomfort from stitches or swelling may make you reluctant to do so. Frequent, gentle contractions will help make you more comfortable and help the healing process.

Initially, choose a position in which you are most comfortable. This may be lying on the bed, in the bath or sitting on the toilet. Try tightening the ring of muscles around the back passage as if to stop yourself passing wind.

At the same time try tightening the muscles of the birth canal or vagina – pulling them in and up as if to stop yourself passing urine. You should feel a tightening from underneath and a gentle lift. Don't worry if you can feel very little happening to start with. This is quite normal. With practice it will become stronger. Avoid holding your breath and tightening your buttocks and legs as you do this exercise. This may feel sore to start with but even a small twitch is a good start.

The hardest part is remembering to do the exercise. Find a memory trigger e.g. washing your hands, meal times or after going to the toilet. Using the toilet as a trigger is a good one as this will stay with you where ever you are, whatever you are doing.

Once you have found your pelvic floor muscles you can begin to build on their strength and endurance.

There are two ways of using your pelvic floor which are both very important.

**FIRSTLY** tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold for as long as you can up to a maximum of 10 seconds.

How many seconds can you hold?  
Rest for 5 seconds.

Repeat this contraction.  
How many contractions can you do?

- a) When feeding the baby, make sure your spine is well supported and in weeks to come, as the baby gets heavier, make sure that you use pillows to support it at the correct height for you to feed.
- b) When changing the baby's nappy make sure you do not bend over to do it.
- c) Take care when doing household chores.

When lifting, bend your knees and keep your back straight.

When shopping try to spread the load between several smaller bags rather than one big one.

Build up your exercise tolerance with walking and swimming.

Continue with postnatal exercises until you have your postnatal check, after which you may start gentle sport or exercise classes.

## IF YOU HAVE HAD A CAESAREAN SECTION:

### Day 1 to 5

1. Take a few deep breaths every now and again to stretch your lungs, thus making up for the lack of normal activity.
2. Don't worry if you need to cough or sneeze, you can't do your stitches any harm. Just bend your knees up and support the wound with your hands or a pad made from a towel - it will give you more confidence to cough effectively. If you are sitting up – lean forward.
3. Regularly bend your ankles up and down. This will improve circulation and again compensate for lack of activity.
4. Pelvic rocking – as Day 1 exercise 2.
5. Deep abdominal exercise.

### AT HOME

Life with a new baby can be very demanding. In spite of this find time to take care of yourself. Adequate rest is as important as exercise and it will help to continue to practice the relaxation technique you learned antenatally.

Back care is especially important at this stage.

Be aware of your posture.

For example:

If you can do 4 contractions and hold for 3 seconds, this is your starting block.

Build on this until you can hold for 10 seconds and repeat 10 times. This may take many weeks or even months to achieve – persevere.

**SECONDLY** you can contract the pelvic floor but relax immediately. This is a 'fast twitch'. Try and repeat this for 10 seconds. Increase to 1 minute at a time.

If everything is fine at your postnatal check, continue doing this exercise 3 or 4 times a day, **every day for the rest of your life.**

Some people feel anxious the first time they have their bowels open. It can help to support the perineum with a pad of tissues or a sanitary towel.

Remember: - you cannot harm your stitches.

### DAY 1 AND 2 – LAY ON YOUR BACK WITH ONE PILLOW

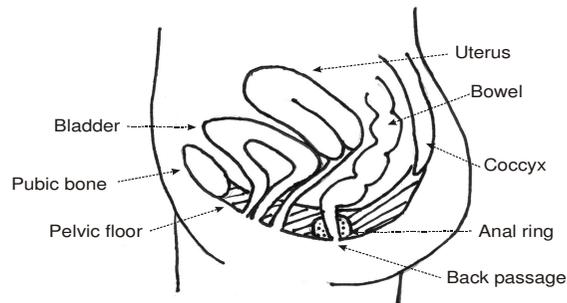
1. Lie comfortably with your legs straight. Pull your feet up towards you and then point them away. Repeat this quickly up to ten times.  
This will help your circulation and reduce swollen ankles. It will relieve tired feet in weeks to come.
2. Pelvic rocking

Lie on your back with your knees bent up, squeeze your buttocks together, and tilt your pelvis to flatten your back into the bed – gently release. This produces a pelvic tilt and can be repeated several times.

When you feel confident with this exercise you can practice the tilt in any position you like.

This exercise will help to improve posture, relieve backache, wind pain, post Caesarean and 'after birth pains'.

### 3. Pelvic floor tightening (as previously described)



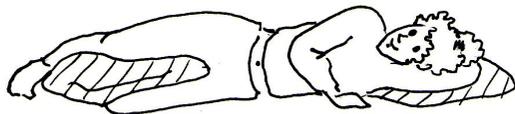
## EXERCISE YOUR STOMACH MUSCLES

### Deep abdominal exercise

Start as soon as you are able.

Begin by exercising the deepest muscle. This acts like a corset and will stabilise your spine and pelvis. It will help flatten your stomach and draw in your waistline.

1. Choose a position where you are comfortable e.g. lying on your side. Don't move your back when you do this. Let your tummy sag! Breathe in gently.



2. As you breathe out, gently draw in the **lower** part of your stomach, as if trying to squeeze into a tight skirt – draw your navel back to your spine. Let go.
3. As you find this easier to do, try and hold the abdominal contraction while you do 3 or 4 gentle breaths. See if you can talk while you do this.

Try this exercise in different positions

- lying on your tummy with a pillow under your stomach
- lying on your back with a pillow under your head, knees bent and feet flat on the bed or floor
- try doing it when you are sitting down feeding your baby

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### 6 weeks onwards

Deep abdominal exercises but kneeling on hands and knees.

