

Physiotherapy Advice after Childbirth

Patient Information – Physiotherapy

Pregnancy and childbirth have had a remarkable impact on your body but with time, rest and exercise most women's bodies recover very well. There are a few things that it is important to know about to help you get back to normal and avoid problems in the future. You can watch our video clip for further information and guidance with exercises.

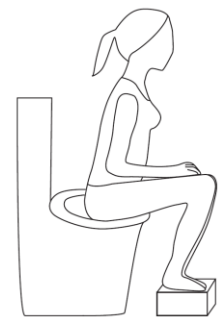
A healthy diet and exercise routine will help you return to your pre-pregnancy weight.

Rest

Rest is important, it helps your body to recover so make sure you spend time resting each day and accept help if it is available.

Bowel care

Get your bowels moving. Constipation can be a problem during pregnancy, but it can also be an issue after childbirth. You want to try and avoid straining as this puts extra pressure on your weakened pelvic floor muscles. Remember to include plenty of fibre and fluid (mostly water) in your diet.



When you get the urge to open your bowels:

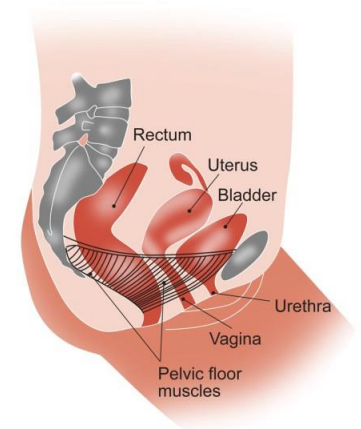
- Have your knees higher than your hips — either raised heels or use a low 15 cm stool.
- Lean forward from your hips. Keep your knees apart and rest your forearms on your thighs.
- Make your waist wide and gently bulge your tummy forward as you work with the urge to go. **DO NOT STRAIN.**

When finished — lift your pelvic floor muscles a few times. If you are having difficulty opening your bowels speak to your LMC.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

Your pelvic floor muscles lie at the base of the pelvis between the pubic bone at the front and tail bone at the back. The outlets from the bladder (urethra), vagina and back passage (anal canal) pass through the pelvic floor muscles. They are lengthened and weakened by pregnancy and childbirth even if you had a Caesarean. They:

- Give support to the pelvic organs (bladder, uterus, rectum — the lower part of the bowel) to prevent or improve prolapse.
- Help to prevent leakage from the bladder (urine) and back passage (wind or faeces).
- Support your pelvis and lower back.
- Have a role in sexual satisfaction.



To exercise your pelvic floor muscles, lie on your side or sit leaning forwards. You need to feel comfortable.

Relax your tummy, bottom and thighs.

Imagine squeezing around your back passage (as if stopping wind) and squeeze around your front passage as if stopping urine. Make sure you continue to breathe normally.

Try to lift and hold for 1-5 seconds then rest for 5 seconds. Repeat 8-10 times, 3 times per day.

General exercise

Returning to general exercise. We suggest you wait before returning to higher levels of exercise to give your pelvic floor, abdominal muscles **and** the rest of your body time to recover.

The time you need to wait varies depending on your previous levels of fitness, your pregnancy and birth experience. If you rush back too soon you risk developing incontinence and/or a prolapse which can be common but is not normal after having a baby.

Walking is the best way to start, perhaps pushing your baby in a buggy rather than carrying in a front pack for the first few weeks as this can again put extra pressure on those weakened pelvic floor muscles.

Swimming is okay from around 6 weeks. It is recommended that women wait at least 3 months before returning to running or higher impact exercise.

Abdominal (tummy) muscles

Abdominal muscles. It is very common for the abdominal muscles to stretch during pregnancy. For most women this resolves in the first few weeks. Some gentle exercises can help to strengthen these muscles. Watch our video for more information or ask your midwife for a copy of the leaflet – Diastasis Rectus Abdominis (Ref.6421).

Driving

After having a **Caesarean**, you are advised not to drive for the first few weeks to make sure you are comfortable, can concentrate and won't pull on your internal stitches if you had to do an emergency stop.

Physiotherapy can help if you have concerns regarding your pelvic floor muscles, your bladder or bowel control, or a feeling of prolapse or discomfort when you resume sexual intercourse. We can also help with scar management and pain. Any backache or pelvic pain you experienced during pregnancy should resolve in the first few weeks but if it continues we can also help with that.

Your LMC or GP can refer you to the physiotherapy team at Christchurch Women's Hospital for advice and treatment or alternatively you can consult a private Women's Health Physiotherapist.

If you wish to speak to a member of our team, please leave a message on 364 0680 or your email address for us to contact you.

Online resource

You can view our video online at www.cdhb.health.nz/postnataleducation or use the QR link. The video is short and has further information that you may find helpful.

