



Waitemata
District Health Board

Best Care for Everyone

Postnatal recovery physiotherapy advice

Information for new mothers

Having a baby can weaken your pelvic floor and your abdominal muscles. The advice in this leaflet will help you recover and prevent long term health problems. If you have further questions please ask to speak with a physiotherapist.

Getting your pelvic floor back in shape

Your pelvic floor supports your bladder, bowel and uterus. It is stretched during pregnancy and birth, even if you had a caesarean.

A weak pelvic floor can lead to incontinence or prolapse.

How to do pelvic floor muscle exercises:

- Sit or lie comfortably and focus on your bladder, vagina and bowel.
- Tighten your pelvic floor squeezing and lifting as if you are trying to control urine and wind.
- While breathing normally tighten the muscles. Hold gently for 2-3 seconds, repeat 3 times in a row, 3 times per day.
- As your muscles get stronger, aim to do 5-10 in a set, holding 5-10 seconds each. Stop when the muscle is tired. Repeat 3 times per day.
- Make it harder by practicing exercises while standing.
- Allow 3 months to re-train your pelvic floor muscles.
- If you are not following *Zuoyuezi* apply an ice pad to your perineum for 5 minutes every 2 hours as this will reduce the swelling and bruising in the first 48 hours.

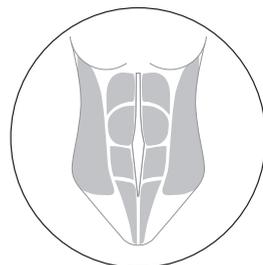
Pelvic floor exercises are for life

Getting your abdominal muscles back in shape

Your deep abdominal muscles are important to maintain posture and provide pelvic and back support. During pregnancy these muscles stretch and weaken.

How to exercise your deep abdominal muscles:

- Sit, lie or stand
- As you breathe out, gently draw your belly button and lower abdomen in towards your spine.
- Keep your chest, back and upper tummy still.
- While breathing normally, hold for 5 seconds, relax, and repeat 5 times.



Bracing

This ensures that your body is kept strong and stable by your inbuilt “corset” of support. Brace your pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles together every time you cough, sneeze, laugh, change position, or lift. If you are following *Zuoyuezi*, it is important to start exercising your pelvic floor muscles and deep abdominal muscles when you have finished this time.

Getting in and out of bed

Protect your tummy and pelvic floor. Brace your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles. Roll onto your side with knees together and lower your feet whilst pushing up with your hands. Don't pull on the bedrails, or sit up from your back.



Going to the toilet

Sitting on the toilet correctly is good for emptying your bowel fully and it reduces pressure and straining of your pelvic floor.

- When opening your bowels, place your feet on a footstool, lean forward and bulge out your abdomen. Don't strain.
- Support your stitches with a clean sanitary pad.



***Drinking water, eating high fibre foods,
and exercising regularly help to prevent constipation***

Return to exercise

First 6 weeks:

Continue doing your pelvic floor and deep abdominal exercise and start a gentle walking program. By six weeks aim to walk for 1 hour - 3 times a week or 30 minutes walking every day.

After 6 weeks:

You can start low impact exercise e.g. yoga, swimming

Some cautions

- Do NOT attempt 'sit ups' for at least 6 weeks
- Do NOT lift anything heavier than the weight of your baby in the first 6 weeks.
- Do NOT twist and lift at the same time
- Do NOT start any high impact exercise for at least 3 months - this may be longer if you have back, pelvic or incontinence problems.

Our Women's Health Physiotherapists

If you need further help with your bladder or bowel control contact our physiotherapists.

North Shore Hospital: 021 946 119

Waitakere Hospital: 021 846 049

For further information see online resources:

Continence Association New Zealand, www.continence.org.nz



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