

Physiotherapy Care Following a Caesarean Section

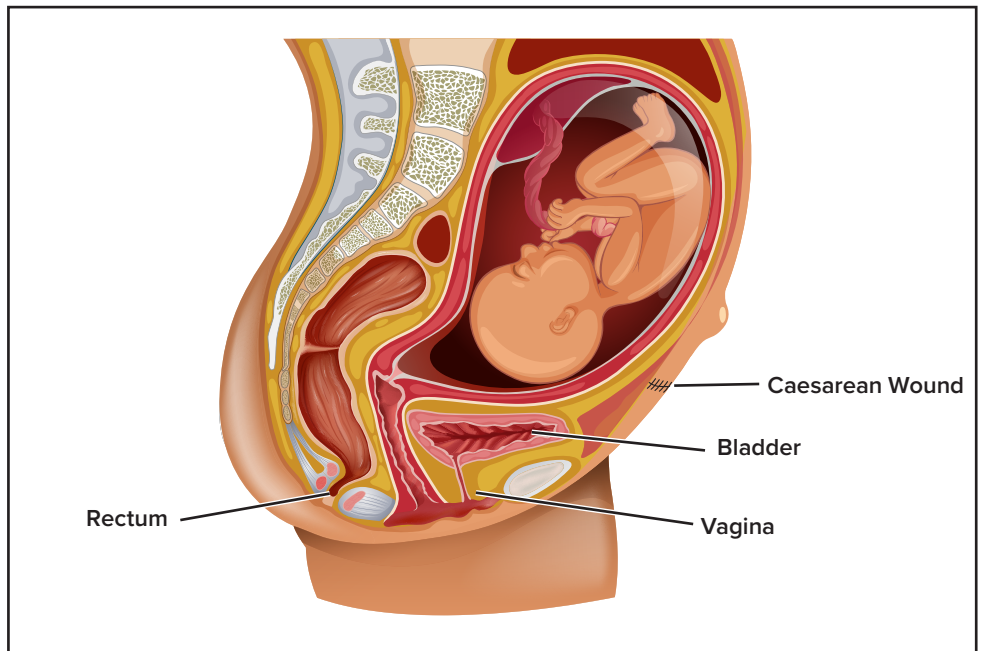
Exercises and Advice



Congratulations on the birth of your baby! There is a lot of focus on your baby, but you also need to allow some time to look after yourself and allow your body to recover. Remember that pregnancy causes stretching and weakening of your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles, so you are at an increased risk of hurting your lower back and pelvis. The following advice and exercises are aimed at helping you recover, regain your muscle strength and avoid any injuries.

Lower Uterine Caesarean section

The surgical technique whereby the baby is delivered through an incision in the uterus and abdomen. This may be planned or an emergency. An incision is made above the pubic bone, horizontally through the skin, fat and muscle layers. This weakens the abdominal muscles.



Physiotherapy and your recovery

It is important to be up and moving as soon as possible following a Caesarean section. This is achieved with pain control and assistance from staff.

Mobility and exercise assist to:

- Maintain a clear chest and prevent chest infections
- Improve circulation to prevent blood clots and remove swelling
- Prevent joint stiffness
- Reduce back pain

Exercises:

- When you are resting in bed for the first day ensure that you regularly move your ankles up and down and take some deep breaths, 10 times every couple of hours.

Walking

- Walking is the best gentle form of exercise
- Start with frequent short walks on the ward, you may need assistance the first time
- Progress to a full lap of the ward
- Aim to walk several times per day

Getting out of bed

- Make sure you avoid any sit-up type movements for the first 6 weeks
- Bend your knees up, one at a time, keeping your feet flat on the bed
- Roll onto your side, keeping your knees together
- Push up on your elbow to a sitting position whilst moving your legs over the side of the bed
- Sit on the edge of the bed with your feet flat on the floor, lean forwards and stand up.



Abdominal and back exercises

These gentle exercises should be commenced as soon as you are able, to assist with:

- Toning the abdominal muscles
- Relieving backache
- Assist with passing of wind

Pelvic rocking technique

Lying on your back with knees bent and slightly apart:

- Draw in your pelvic floor and lower stomach muscles
- Tilt the hip bones backwards and flatten your back into the bed
- Lift your tailbone slightly, keeping your bottom on the bed
- Keep breathing, hold for 5 seconds
- Repeat 5–10 times.



Knee rolling technique

Lying on your back with knees bent and together:

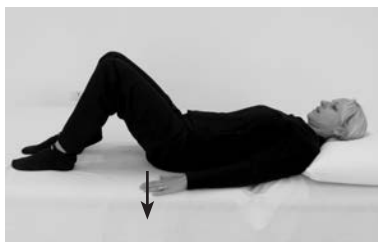
- Roll both knees gently to each side, keeping shoulders flat on the bed
- Keep breathing, hold for 5 seconds
- Repeat 5 times each side



Core abdominal technique

Begin in side lying or on your back, progress to sitting and then standing:

- Keep your lower back flat
- Draw your belly button in towards your spine whilst breathing out (your lower back shouldn't move)
- Hold your belly button in this position whilst breathing to the count of 10
- Relax for the same length of time you held
- Repeat 10 times
- Once you have achieved this, try to contract your PFM's at the same time.



At home care

It may take 6–12 weeks for your body to heal and your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles to regain strength. It is important to listen to your body and give yourself time to recover.

If you feel tired or your wound aches, your body is telling you to rest.

Some guidelines are listed below:

Avoid strenuous activity for 6–8 weeks

- Limit heavy housework such as vacuuming, sweeping, mopping
- Gradually increase your activity levels as comfort allows.

Avoid heavy lifting for 6–8 weeks

- Don't lift anything heavier than your baby for 6 weeks (~5kgs)
- Ensure a correct lifting technique is used

Commence a gentle daily exercise routine:

- Start with short walks on flat surfaces and progress distance and duration slowly
- Include PFM and abdominal exercises as directed by your physiotherapist
- Involve your baby in exercise activities if suitable
- Drink adequate amounts of water (2–3 litres if breastfeeding)
- By 6–8 weeks post caesarean progress to low impact activities
- Options include: cycling, yoga, swimming or postnatal exercise classes
- Gradually progress your exercise frequency, duration and intensity
- It is recommended to wait 12–16 weeks post birth before re-commencing contact sports or high impact exercise programs i.e. running. If you commence too early you can cause problems now or later in life. These might include incontinence, prolapse or chronic back pain.



Back Care

After giving birth, your back is more vulnerable to injury. This is due to a number of factors including:

- Weak abdominal and pelvic floor muscles
- Lax ligaments due to hormones
- Increased activities of daily living due to baby care needs

Posture

Following your pregnancy, it is important to maintain good posture to prevent back strain and injury. This is achieved by sitting and standing with a straight back, shoulders back and chin tucked in.

- Sit tall
- Stand tall
- Walk tall



Lifting

Whilst pregnant and up to 6 months following the birth, a correct lifting technique is vital in preventing back strain and injury.

- Bend your knees
- Brace your abdominals
- Bring the object close to your body
- Breathe out as you lift.



Back care at home

It may take up to 6 months for your muscles and ligaments to recover and regain strength. Take time and think about your posture with all activities.

Advice to avoid back injury/pain post-delivery:

- Always use the correct lifting technique
- Perform abdominal and PFM exercises to regain strength and support your back
- Avoid heavy lifting:
 - Try to avoid taking baby capsules in and out of the car
 - Try not to lift heavy baby baths
 - Avoid lifting washing baskets full of wet clothes
- When feeding your baby ensure a good back and neck posture (use pillows and a supportive chair).



Good Bladder and Bowel Habits

Good Bladder habits

- Drink 1.5 – 2 litres of fluid daily (Increase to 3L if breastfeeding)
- Limit caffeine, alcohol and soft drink intake
- Empty bladder when it feels full, not 'just in case' or too often
- If bladder sensation has not returned fully yet, aim to time your voids 3-4 hourly
- Sit on the toilet seat. **DO NOT HOVER**

It is normal to pass urine 4-6 times daily and 0-1 times overnight.

You should aim to empty 300-500mls each time

Good bowel habits

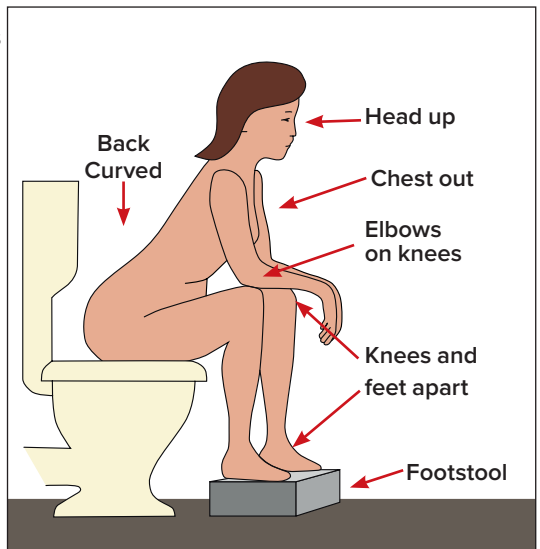
- Follow a healthy diet full of fresh fruit and vegetables, water and fibre
- Empty your bowels **ONLY** when you feel an urge.
- Do **NOT** strain. Relax and take your time.
- Use a good sitting posture on the toilet (refer to diagram on next page)
- Engage in regular exercise to assist with a healthy bowel process

It is normal to open your bowels from 3 times daily up to 3 times weekly

Posture for bowel emptying

- Keep your back straight, lean forwards and rest your forearm on your knees
- Place a small stool underneath your feet, or, lift your heels slightly
- Take a deep breath in and on breath out bulge your tummy
- Make a hissing sound or an 'eeeeee' sound to help activate the correct muscles

You can support your abdominal incision by applying gentle pressure with a small folded towel



Pelvic Floor Muscles (PFM's)

What is the Pelvic Floor?

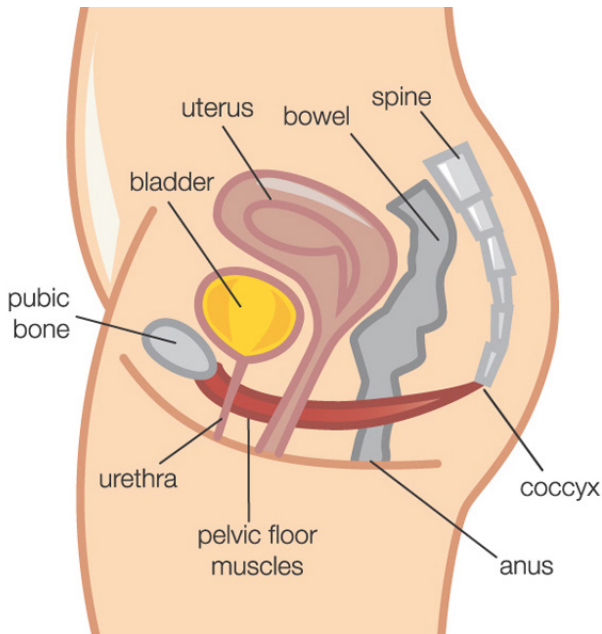
The pelvic floor are a sling of muscles that sit at the base of the pelvis. These muscles stretch like a hammock from the pubic bone to the tailbone (coccyx) and from side to side. They are part of a group of muscles referred to as your “core”.

Why is the pelvic floor important?

- They maintain continence of your bladder and bowel
- They support your abdominal organs
- They assist in better sexual function
- They have a role in supporting your back
- They prevent and reduce the risk of prolapse.

When to exercise

You may start doing your pelvic floor exercises 24 hours after birth (If a catheter is in place, wait until it has been removed). These exercises will help your perineum and vagina heal quickly by promoting circulation, which will assist in the removal of swelling and bruising



How to do your pelvic floor exercises properly

You can do your pelvic floor exercises in any position however starting in a side-lying position may be easiest. It is important to progress your exercises into sitting and standing as soon as possible.

Seated Technique

1. Sit tall and lean forwards slightly.
2. Relax your thigh, bottom and tummy muscles. Focus only on your pelvic floor muscles.
3. Breathe out and gently tighten around your front passage. Imagine that you are trying to stop the flow of urine
4. Breathing normally, be aware of those muscles that may be tensing and focus on relaxing them
5. Again gently tighten around your front passage and draw up the front part of the vaginal wall.
6. You should feel a gentle lift in the muscles at the front and back. After childbirth it is important to focus on the front part of the pelvic floor
7. In the period after birth, practice doing these little and often throughout the day. Aim for about 4-5 gentle contractions at a time.
8. Take the time to relax fully in between these contractions
9. When you can achieve 10 of these gentle contractions in a row, known as a 'set', progress to repeating 2-3 times daily

Remember to turn on your PFM's (known as the 'Knack') when you feel you are about to leak including when you

- Cough, sneeze or laugh
- Lift objects
- Carry your baby

Success does not happen overnight. PFM's can take 6-12 weeks after birth to regain strength. Work on this program daily to ensure that your pelvic floor muscles are supporting you in everyday living.

If you have any queries or concerns, please consult your Physiotherapist.



