

Patient information

Postnatal exercises

Barts Health Physiotherapy Website:

www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy



What does this leaflet cover?

This leaflet is designed to give you information about exercises that you can do whether you have given birth vaginally or by caesarean section. Discuss any queries or worries with your midwife or physiotherapist.

Exercise after giving birth is important and can help you regain your fitness, give you more energy and possibly avoid future problems. Even though you will not return to your pre-pregnancy fitness immediately, it is important to take time for yourself and gradually build up your fitness level.

Aim to practice these exercises once to twice a day. If using a gym ball, position it near to something solid, e.g. door, sofa, that you can hold on to if needed.

Caesarean delivery

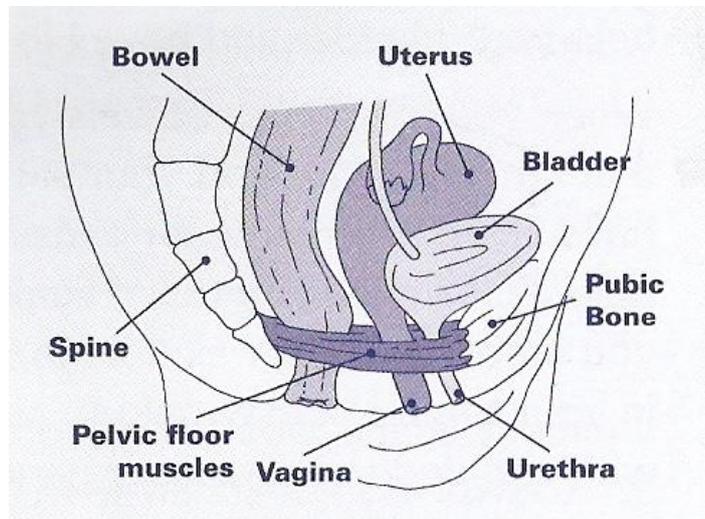
The information in this booklet also applies if you have had a Caesarean Section. You may, however be more tired, and so do not expect too much too soon. Accept any help that is offered.

For the first 6 weeks:

- Take regular pain relief as required
- Support your wound if you need to cough, sneeze or laugh
- Avoid activities which may cause strain (e.g. heavy housework, standing for long periods)
- Avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby

Pelvic floor exercises

Whatever has happened during birth (e.g. C-Section, 3rd/4th Degree Tears), you can start pelvic floor exercises as soon as possible. If you had a catheter, wait until this has been removed.



Choose a comfortable position. Breathe in. As you breathe out very gently tighten the muscles around:

1. Around your anal opening, as though trying to stop yourself from passing wind.
2. Your vagina, as though holding in a tampon, and
3. Your bladder opening, as though trying to stop yourself from passing urine

The overall feeling should be 'squeeze and lift'. In the first few days these may be painful. Only squeeze as hard as feels comfortable and then release.

Repeat this a few times a day at first, and as you become stronger and the pain is more under control, hold the squeezes

for longer. See how long you can make each contraction last and how often you can repeat it at any one time.

Do this 3 times every day.

Once there is no pain when activating your pelvic floor, make each contraction very quick and very powerful then release it immediately; aim for 10 repetitions at a time.

Aim to do this 3 times every day.

DO:

- Activate your pelvic floor before coughing, sneezing or laughing
- These exercises anywhere EXCEPT while using the toilet
- Keep breathing
- Only squeeze deep muscles – you should not be able to feel your buttock or thigh muscles squeezing too.

Finally, to make your muscles work harder, change the position in which you exercise - lying down is easiest, then sitting but eventually try in standing

Tummy doming (diastasis of rectus abdominis muscle)

While you are pregnant your abdominal (six-pack) muscles come apart to allow room for your baby to grow. These muscles can take time to come back together. **Doming** is when your abdominal contents push through this gap between your muscles, and can prevent or delay them coming back together after you have given birth.

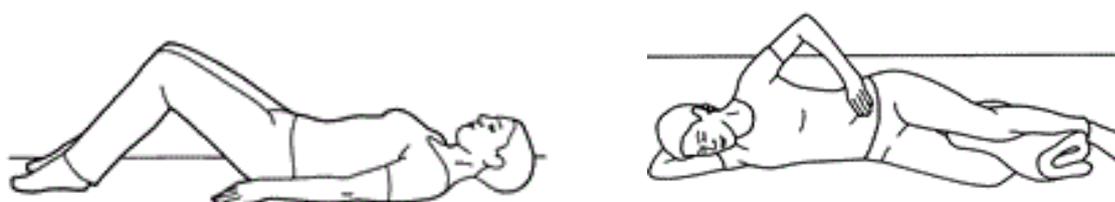


While you still notice tummy doming:

- Avoid heavy lifting or bending.
- Avoid straining on the toilet
- Avoid aggressive abdominal exercises that would put strain on the midline of the abdominals (e.g. sit ups or crunches)
- When you get out of bed, turn onto one side, let legs hang off the bed and push up with your elbows from your side to avoid the sit-up motion
- Activate your Deep Tummy Muscles (Page 5) before doing activities that cause doming that you can't avoid (e.g. leaning forward)
- See below for exercises to strengthen your core muscles
- Seek advice from physiotherapy if doming is not improving 6 months after giving birth.

Early exercises

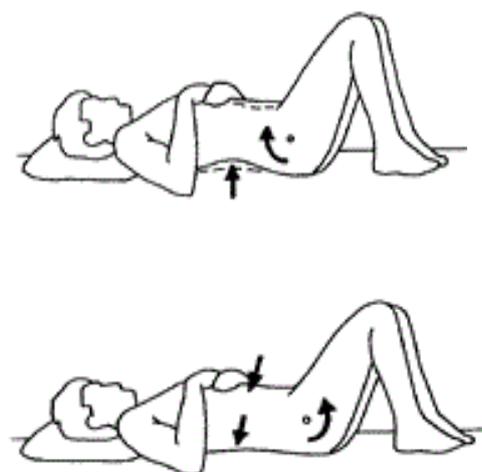
Deep tummy muscles



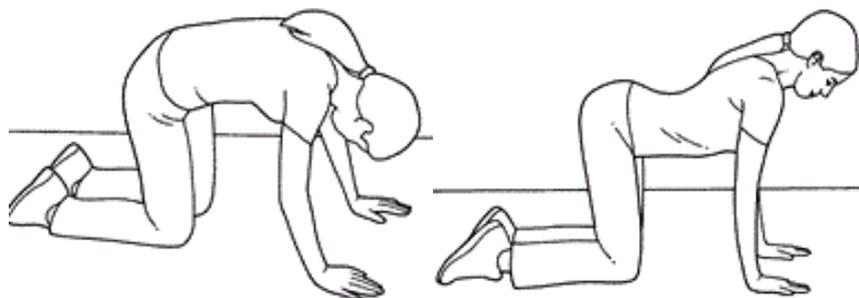
Choose a comfortable position. This could be lying on your back or side, standing or sitting or on hands and knees. Imagine you are wearing a low-slung belt across your hips. Gently draw in the area between your tummy button and pubic bone towards your spine as if you were trying to do the belt up a few more notches. Hold for 5 secs. Relax. Repeat times. Do not hold your breath while exercising your deep tummy muscles.

Pelvic tilt

Start lying on the floor. You can also do this sitting on a chair or gym ball. Round your lower back and roll your pelvis backwards over your sitting bones. Feel the stretch in your lower back. Return to the starting position. Repeat times.

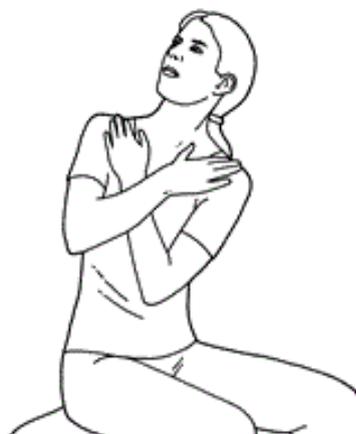


Cat stretch



On your hands and knees. Curl your back up towards the ceiling and let your head drop down towards the floor. Return to starting position. Repeat times.

Spine twist



Sit on a chair or a gym ball. Place your palms on opposite shoulders. Rotate as far as you can to the left side. Hold for 5 secs. Return to the starting position. Repeat to the right side. Repeat times.

Knee rolling



Lying on your back with your knees bent. Gently hollow your tummy and keeping your upper back still, gently roll your knees from side to side. Repeat times to each side.

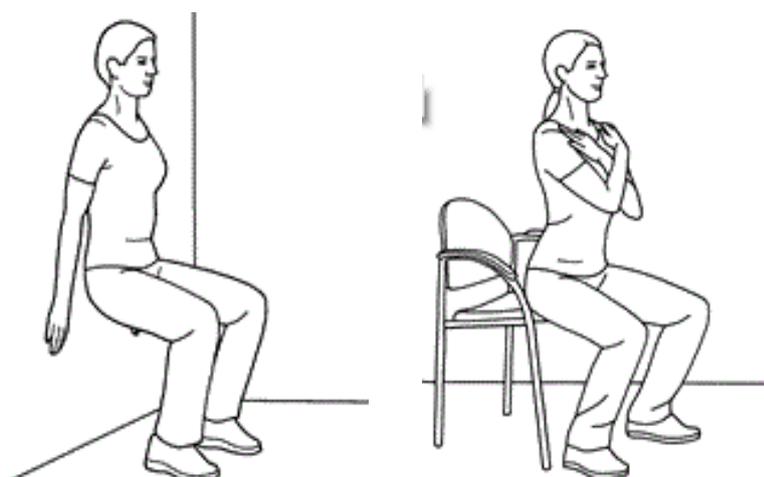
Knee bends



Lying on your back with your knees straight, activate your deep tummy muscles and slowly bend one knee, bringing your heel towards your bottom. Hold for ... seconds. Repeat times on each side.

Later exercises

Squats against the wall



Lean against a wall, with or without a gym ball behind your back, and your feet hip-width apart. Bend both knees as far as is shown in the pictures. Return to standing position. You can also do this without a wall, using a chair behind you going from standing, to sitting on the edge of the chair and back. Repeat times.

Inner thigh leg lifts

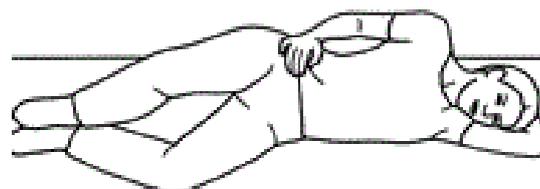
Lie on your side as shown, with your top leg resting in front of your body supported on a pillow and your bottom leg resting on the mat. Lift the bottom leg up. Lower. Repeat times.



Repeat on the other side.

Clam

Lie on your side with a pillow between your knees and your feet one on top of the other. Lift the top knee up then lower, keeping your feet together.



Repeat times. Repeat on the other side.

Lift and lower

Lie on your side with both legs straight. Push your top heel back so your leg is still held straight, but is slightly behind you. Lift the top leg and lower. You should feel the



muscles in your bottom working. Repeat times. Repeat on the other side.

More challenging exercises

Make sure you do **not** see any Doming of your tummy with any of these exercises (see page 5)

Bridging



Lying with your back with your knees bent. Activate your tummy muscles, flatten back onto the floor (pelvic tilt), then slowly lift your bottom up aiming for your body to form a straight line. Hold for a few seconds. See how long you can hold on for. Then very slowly, return to the starting position.

Repeat times.

Contact Information for Barts Health Therapies Department

The Royal London Hospital
Telephone No: 0207 377 7872
Email: BHNT.BartsHealthTherapies@nhs.net

Mile End Hospital
Telephone No: 0207 377 7872
Email: BHNT.BartsHealthTherapies@nhs.net

Whipps Cross University Hospital
Telephone: 0208 539 5522, Ext: 5485 (Wanstead site: 0208 989 2368, Chingford site: 0208 524 3071)
Email: wxphysio.outpatients@bartshealth.nhs.uk

Newham University Hospital
Telephone No: 0207 363 8141
Email: TherapyOutpatients.Newham@bartshealth.nhs.uk

For patient information leaflets on other conditions please visit:
www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Please contact us if you need general information or advice about Trust services.
www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals

Large print and other languages

For this leaflet in large print, please speak to your clinical team.
For help interpreting this leaflet in other languages, please ring 020 8223 8934.

Te informacje mogą zostać na żądanie przedstawione w formatach alternatywnych, takich jak łatwy do czytania lub duża czcionka, i w różnych językach. Prosimy o kontakt pod numerem 02082238934.

Macluumaadkan waxaa lagu heli karaa qaabab kale, sida akhriska fudud ama daabacaadda wayn, oo waxaa lagu heli karaa luqaddo kale, marka la codsado. Fadlan la xidhiidh 02082238934.

এই তথ্য বিকল্প ফরম্যাটে, যেমন সহজে পড়া যায় অথবা ডি বিন্ট প্রিন্ট আপনার অনুটরাটে বিকল্প ভাষায় পাওয়া যেতে পারে। অনুগ্রহপূর্বক যোগাযোগ করুন 02082238934।

Bu bilgiler, okuması kolay veya büyük baskılar gibi alternatif biçimlerde ve talep üzerine alternatif dillerde de sunulabilir. İrtibat için lütfen 02082238934 numaralı telefondan ulaşın.

اس معلومات کو متبادل شکل، جیسے، پڑھنے میں آسان یا بڑے حروف، میں دستیاب کرایا جا سکتا ہے، اور درخواست کرنے پر اسے متبادل زبان میں بھی دستیاب کرایا جا سکتا ہے۔ براہ مہربانی 02082238934 پر رابطہ کریں۔

Tell us what you think

Tweet us [@NHSBartsHealth](https://twitter.com/NHSBartsHealth)

Talk to us via www.facebook.com/bartshealth

Leave feedback on NHS Choices www.nhs.uk

Reference: BH/PIN/738

Publication date: December 2017

All our patient information leaflets are reviewed every three years.