



**WEST GIPPSLAND
HEALTHCARE GROUP**

Caring for our Community

Postnatal Physiotherapy

Patient Information Booklet

Prepared by
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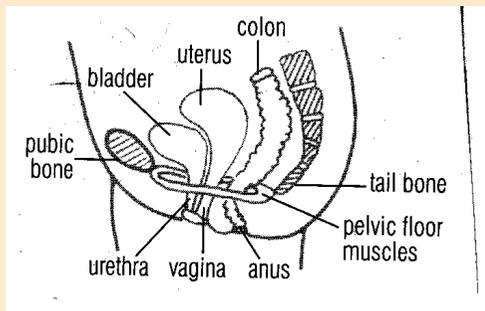
After you have a baby, it is vital to have a balance between exercise, rest and a good diet.

This booklet has been put together to help you and your body recover from the birth. We recommend:

- Exercise needs to be started slowly and should be done often
- You can start the exercises in this booklet 48 hours after the birth
- These exercises should not cause you any pain. If you feel pain when exercising, please stop and contact the Physiotherapy Department for further advice.
- You get some rest every day for your wellbeing and to give your pelvic floor muscles a chance to recover.

Pelvic Floor Muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles between the pubic bone at the front and the tail bone at the back. The pelvic floor has openings for the three outlets (bladder, vagina and bowel).



Pelvic floor muscles:

- Provide support for the bladder, uterus and bowel
- Help with bladder and bowel control
- Assist other muscles to stabilise the back and pelvis
- Have a role in sexual function and sensation.

Pelvic floor muscles can become weak during pregnancy and labour. During pregnancy, the weight of your baby stretches the pelvic floor causing weakening of the muscle.

During labour, further stretching and tearing of the muscles also cause them to become weak.

Chronic constipation and straining can also weaken and stretch the pelvic floor every time you use your bowels.

Looking after your pelvic floor muscles after birth

During the first 48-72 hours after the birth, there may be a lot of bruising and swelling. We recommend you follow the **RICE** rules:

- R REST** You must have daily rest either on your back or on your stomach. Sitting and standing will cause extra stress on your already 'stretched' pelvic floor.
- I ICE** Ice packs are available. Please ask the nursing staff for assistance.
- C Compression** By wearing maternity pads (wear two (2) if needed) with firm underwear.
- E Exercise** See the section in this booklet 'Pelvic Floor Exercises'.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

Choose a supported, comforted position. Lying down will be the easiest position to start with.

Tighten the muscles around the vagina and anus altogether and draw up inside. Aim to hold for 3-5 seconds, then relax and rest for 5-10 seconds. Repeat again up to ten (10) times. Do this exercise three (3) times each day.

As you find the exercises become easier, progress to holding for longer and repeating more.

Brace with your pelvic floor muscles when lifting. Avoid constipation and heavy lifting.

Tips to avoid constipation

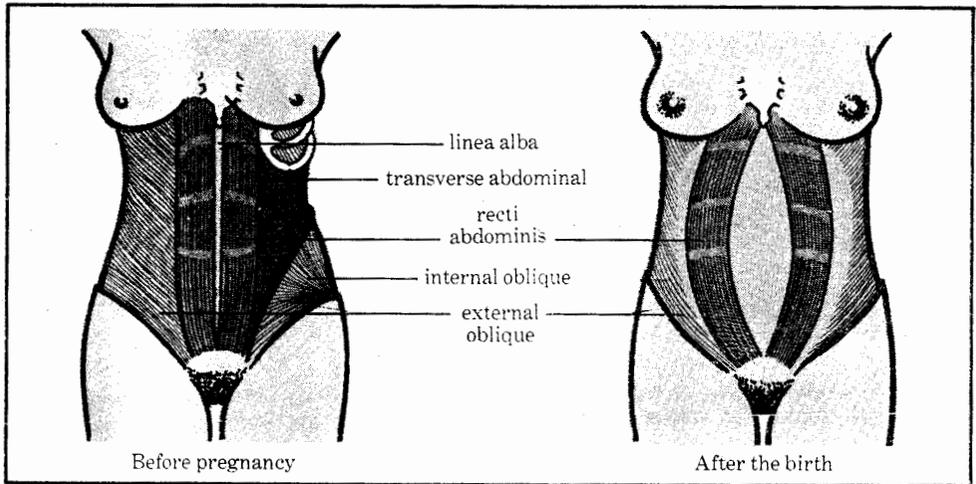
- Drink two (2) litres of fluid a day – mostly water
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and cereal
- Exercise daily eg go for a walk
- Sit the right way on the toilet to use your bowels.

To use your bowels correctly

- Sit with your knees apart and above the level of your hips
- (you may need a footstool)
- Rest your elbows on your knees
- Your tummy will bulge and your waist will widen
- Don't strain.



Changes in abdominal muscles after birth



Abdominal muscles consist of four layers.

Transversus abdominis is the deepest muscle layer. This deep muscle layer has a vital role in back care, as it provides support to the back during daily activities.

During pregnancy, the abdominal muscles stretch and this results in weakness.

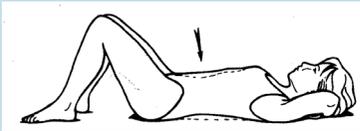
Exercises to improve abdominal muscle function

Abdominal Brace



Lie on your back. Tighten your lower tummy area toward your spine. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 5 times. Do this exercise 3 times per day.

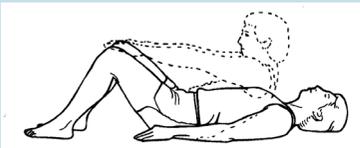
Pelvic Tilt



Lie on your back with your knees bent. Gently tighten your tummy and tuck your tail under. Repeat 5 times. Do this exercise 3 times per day.

Progress to the exercises below only when you are able to maintain your pelvic floor and abdominal brace for the whole movement.

Curl up



Place your hands on thighs, draw up your pelvic floor and draw in your lower abdominal muscle to tilt the pelvis to flatten the back.

Raise your head and slide your hands towards your knees. Repeat 5-10 times.

Side Curl Up



With arms at sides, tilt pelvis to flatten back. Raise head and shoulders, turning to one side as the shoulder blades clear the floor. Hold for 2

seconds. Repeat 5-10 times each side.

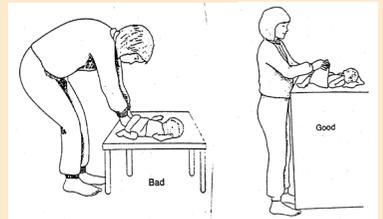
Don't forget:

- Always brace with your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles prior to your curl up exercises.
- DO NOT HOLD YOUR BREATH when doing the exercises

Tips on posture and back care

After pregnancy and childbirth, your back may be at risk because of the weakness of the abdominal muscles and joints that become loose during pregnancy. Do not bend when lifting and keep things at waist height.

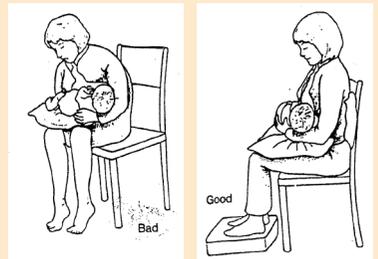
- Keep an upright posture if you are standing or sitting
- Always work at a good height - avoid bending.



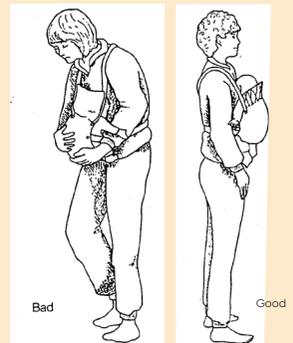
Adjust your change table to waist height.

When you are feeding your baby, make sure you use pillows to support your lower back, arm and shoulder.

- Avoid lifting heavy loads by dividing the load into smaller loads
- Work with your knees bent instead bending your back.
- If you are going to use a baby sling, sure it is adjusted to chest height.



Always remember to brace your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles during your daily actions or chores and when you lift, sneeze cough.



General fitness and rest

Fitness and rest are important factors in coping with changes and stresses within the family after child birth.

Try and have some rest (lying flat) during the day eg when your baby is sleeping.

You can start your walking program as soon as you feel able. You may like to start off gently, walking about 10 minutes each day and gently building up to do brisk walks in the next 6 weeks.

If you are planning to play sport again, please ensure your pelvic floor has recovered its strength. You can test the strength by:

- Having three (3) good coughs
- Jumping five (5) times.

If you don't leak urine, your pelvic floor is strong enough to cope with return to sport.

If you have any doubts please contact the Physiotherapy Department on 5623 0644 for further advice.

If you have problems with leaking urine, wind or problems with bowel control or pelvic pain which does not get better, please contact your doctor or the Continence Service on 5625 0251.

After caesarean birth

In the first few days:

- When resting in bed for long periods, move your feet up and down regularly to improve circulation in your legs
- Take five (5) deep breaths, followed by a cough (support your wound with your hands or a pillow while coughing) every hour.

To get out of bed:

- Bend your knees, roll onto your side and use your hands to push up into the sitting position as you lower your legs over the side of the bed

- Start the exercises in this booklet as soon as you can after birth. You should feel comfortable to start the pelvic floor exercises and gentle abdominal brace exercises 24-48 hours after birth. If you feel uncomfortable, wait another day
- Do not lift anything heavier than your baby for the first 4-6 weeks
- Gradually return to normal activities as you feel able over the next 4-6 weeks. Discuss return to driving with your doctor (you are also advised to consult your car insurance policy).

If you have any queries about the information contained in this booklet, please telephone the Physiotherapy Department on 5623 0644.



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