Postnatal Exercise Class

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West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

Patient information

Postnatal Exercise Class

Excellent patient care, together

Introduction

This leaflet applies to all new mothers'/birthing people whether you have given birth vaginally or by a caesarean section. It includes practical advice to aid your recovery now and looking after your pelvic health in the future too.

The postnatal period is a time of significant physical and emotional change as your body recovers from pregnancy and birth. Every person's recovery is different, and it's normal for healing, strength, and confidence to return at different rates.

This leaflet has been written by a pelvic health physiotherapist to provide general information and practical advice to support your recovery. It covers common postnatal changes, simple self-management strategies, and guidance to help you regain pelvic floor function, core strength, and overall wellbeing.

Disclaimer

The information in this leaflet is intended as general guidance only and should not replace individual medical assessment or treatment. Every pregnancy, birth, and recovery is unique. If you have concerns about your symptoms, experience pain, notice changes that worry you, or would like advice tailored to your individual circumstances, please speak to your GP, midwife, or pelvic health physiotherapist. They can assess your specific needs and recommend the most appropriate care for you.

Useful resources

If you have a smartphone, you can scan these QR codes using the camera to bring up more information.

Bladder care advice

Bowel care Advice

Pelvic floor exercises

Perineal tears/ Episiotomies

Post-natal exercises

Caesarean section

Urinary incontinence

It can be common to experience some urinary incontinence postnatally; however, these are symptoms that should not persist as time goes on. Your body should slowly heal, and this can take time and patience, as well as persistence with exercise and your management program you may have been given.

As your hormones begin to regulate postnatally, and your tissues have improved in their strength and support, you should be seeing slow and steady improvements in your urinary dysfunction. This can take up to 1 year- 18months at times to return to your pre-natal levels. If you are finding that you are not seeing improvements, or you feel you are not clear on your management program, ensure you communicate this with your GP or Pelvic Health Physiotherapist. For more information scan or click on this QR code:

Sexual health

You can resume sexual activity when you feel ready for it. Some women prefer to wait until they have had their 6-week postnatal check-up, and some women wish to wait well beyond this. Sexual activity is meant to be enjoyable for both partners, and communication regarding anxieties or concerns with your partner can be very helpful in helping you return to this in a way that makes you feel safe and comfortable.

You may want to use lubricant, especially if you are breastfeeding, as it is very common to experience vaginal dryness due to continued hormonal changes. It is best to start gently and slowly progress as you feel comfortable to do so. If you have persistent discomfort or pain with sexual activity, ask your GP for further help. Remember to decide what contraception to use, fertility levels are usually high following delivery.

Looking after your back

Your body is still recovering for a long time after your baby arrives, and as a new parent you will be doing many physically demanding activities throughout the day. Here are some useful tips for looking after yourself:

- try bending your knees when lifting something heavy
- gently draw in your pelvic floor muscles if feeling heaviness or symptoms when lifting
- try tightening your deep abdominal wall muscles
- try breathing out as your lift
- keep the object you are lifting in front of your body e.g., a car seat /buggy/ toddler

Please note, some of these strategies will feel better for some postnatal women but not others. Finding the strategies that suit you is advised and if unsure, speak with your healthcare professional.

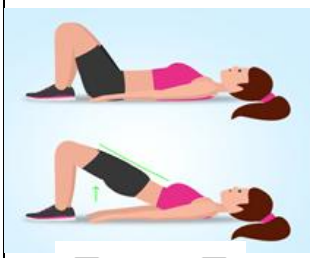
Postnatal considerations for exercise

Recovering postnatally is a big challenge. You need to consider all aspects of your wellbeing when trying to progress and achieve more. Throughout pregnancy and postnatally your body has changed. You are also recovering hormonally, which has an impact on how we store or lose body fat and build muscle. This means you may have more difficulty returning to exercise after having a baby than you may have realised

.

Now that you have returned to exercise, you may also see your progress is slower than it was prior to pregnancy, and that is okay. Most postnatal women struggle with the foundations of a good night’s sleep, a healthy and balanced diet, and the time to commit to exercise. These are the foundations of your recovery, and it may be helpful to speak to family and friends who may be able to support you in any areas you are struggling.

It is important to balance everything as well as you can, and don’t try to spread yourself too thin. You need sleep, hydration, and nutrition to be able to perform and progress.

PFM & Trans Abs 	• lying on your back with your knees bent and hip width apart. • Exhale: engage pelvic floor and sip up towards belly button. • Inhale: relax and let go allowing stomach to rise.	
Pelvic Tilts 	• In a seated position or lying on your back with your knees bent. • Stick your bottom out by arching your back. • Tuck your bottom in and flatten your back to the surface. • Encourage deep breathing throughout the movement. • Progression: engage your transverse abdominal (tummy) muscles and pelvic floor to form your **core cylinder** in either of the above positions. This can be completed in standing.	
Glute Bridge 	• Lie on your back with your knees bent and hip width apart. • Engage your core cylinder and push through your heels to lift your bottom up. • Slowly and controlled return to the start position. • Progression: hold the movement for 5-10secs or hold your baby on your pelvis or lift your bottom-up using one leg.	
Scissors 	• Lying on you back with knees bent and hip width apart. • Exhale: engage pelvic floor and trans abs, keep ribs on floor while slowly raising your knee to hip height. • Inhale slowly lower without spine arching. • Progress by alternating knee lifts.	

Four-point kneeling 	• In hands and knees position – hands under shoulders, shoulder width apart & knees under hips, hip width apart. • Adopting neutral spine posture. • Exhale: engage pelvic floor and trans abs. Stomach tissue draws towards spine. • Inhale: relax and let go.	

Bear Hover

	• In hands and knees position – hands under shoulders, shoulder width apart & knees under hips, hip width apart.
	• Adopting neutral spine posture.
	• Exhale:
	  ○ engage pelvic floor and trans abs. Stomach tissue draws towards spine.
	  ○ Push though hands and feet to raise knees a cm from floor.
	  ○ Hover.
	• Inhale lower and relax.	

Bird Dog/ Superhero 	• Have your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips (4-point kneeling). • Use your pelvic tilts to find neutral spine position- “table”. • Return to the starting position after each movement, avoiding trunk rotation and engaging your core cylinder. • Breath out lifting one arm forwards. • Breath out stretching one leg straight behind. • Exhale, lift opposite arm and leg off floor.	
Plank (kneeling / Full) 	• Forearms on the floor, elbows under shoulders. • Kneeling – knees beyond hips while maintaining neutral spine. • Full plank- legs extended straight and toes under ankle while maintaining neutral spine.	

	• Engage PFM and Trans Abs while breathing out. • Take of body through forearms and legs hols this position.	
Side plank (kneeling/ Full)  	• In side-lying with knees bent in front and on top of each other. Heels in line with bottom. • Elbow under should and forearm on mat. • Engage PFM and Trans abs while breathing out and raising bottom and pelvis off floor. • Full side plank- extend legs into straight side-lying position. • Engage PFM and Tran abs while breathing out and raising bottom and pelvis off floor putting weight through forearm and feet.	
Shoulder press  	• Standing with neutral spine adjust pelvis and ribs stacked over each other, feet hip width apart. • Engage PFM and Trans abs. • Both hands start at shoulder height with weights in hands and elbows to the side of body. • Straighten arms above head and return to shoulder height. • Avoid elbows coming forward.	
Squats 	• Stand shoulder width apart. • Bend your knees taking your bottom backwards and towards the floor. • Engage your core cylinder and breathe out whilst lowering your bottom. • Return to the starting position by pushing through your heels and squeezing your bottom muscles at top. • Progression: arms go up over head as you lower into a squat position or hold your baby (use your sling) to complete exercise or complete this on one leg (single leg).	

Lunges 	• Take a step backwards and bend your back knee as if you're kneeling to the floor. • Breathe out and engage your core cylinder as you bend your knee. • Return to the starting position. • Progression: take your hands over your head as you bend the back knee or hold your baby (use your sling).	
Deadlift 	• Standing with feet hip width apart, unlock knees, holding weight in hands. • Slide weight down legs, while moving bottom back, maintaining unlocked knees, while keeping spine neutral. • Push through feet straightening through legs and come back to standing but avoid hyperextending back.	
Heel raises 	• Standing with feet hip width apart. • Raise heels off floor keeping weight through front of your feet equally. • Slowly lower heels back to floor.	
Bent over rows 	• Standing hip with apart with body leaning forward with a bent knee posture. • Engage PFM and Trans Abs • Both hands holding weights, arms start in front, bending elbows and bring beyond spine alongside squeezing shoulder blades together. • Return arms to start position.	

Single snatch 	• Feet hip width apart, dumbbell in one hand. Hinge at the hips into a squat position. • Drive through your heels as you come into a standing position – explosive extension. • Lift the weight above your head, drop into a soft squat. Then come into full standing, arm straight overhead.	

Returning to Running or Other Impact Exercise Postnatally

Running and other impact sports are great forms of cardiovascular exercise and can be excellent for aiding your physical and mental health. However, it is important to return to these activities with care after pregnancy and birth, and at the right time for your body. We would not suggest returning to running or impact sports until at least 12 weeks postnatally. This is a rough guideline, and some people may need to wait longer than this.

Please scan this QR code for a link to further information on post-natal exercise:

Other Considerations

Make sure that you consider wearing a supportive sports bra and supportive footwear when returning to exercise to reduce your risk of injury. If you are breastfeeding or expressing, you will often find it more comfortable to exercise when your breasts are no full. Consider planning your exercise for soon after you feed or express.

If you are looking for a gradual returning to running program to follow, consider the 'Couch to 5K' program on the NHS website or by downloading the Couch to 5K App.

Please scan this QR code for a link to further information on return to running:

Buggy Running

Buggy running is an excellent solution to managing childcare around exercise; however, it is not recommended until your baby is 6-9 months old. This ensures the baby's neck and back has developed sufficiently to cope with the motion. You should only use a specific running buggy, both for your safety as well as your baby's safety.

These buggies should have:

- A 5-point carness for baby
- 3 wheels
- A fixed front wheel
- Hand-operated breaks
- A wrist strap
- Rear-wheel suspension
- Pneumatic tyres

You can run with either two hands or one hand on the buggy, or with a 'push and chase' technique. All are shown to be effective and safe.

How to contact us

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PALS

If you need this leaflet in another **language, large print, Braille or audio version**, please call **01923 217198** or email westherts.pals@nhs.net.









Concerns, complaints or suggestions

If you are unhappy with your experience or would like to give feedback, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). PALS is available to patients, relatives, carers and friends to raise concerns.

For more information, please scan the QR code or visit our website.

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Ratified / review date	Aug 26 / July 29
ID number	45-2542-V1