

# Recovery and Exercises After Having a Baby

## Physiotherapy Department

The information in this booklet is for you to discuss together with your physiotherapist to help your recovery after birth.

If you have any questions about the information in this booklet, please contact the Physiotherapy Department.

**RBWH Physiotherapy Department**  
**Level 2 Ned Hanlon Building RBWH**  
**Phone: 3646 4319**

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To access this booklet online or for more information, visit our website by scanning the QR code

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# **How to Get in and Out of Bed**

## **Getting out of bed**

- Bend your knees
- Draw in your tummy and pelvic floor muscles
- Roll onto your side
- Push through your arms to sit up



## **Getting into bed**

- Sit on the bed and draw in your tummy and pelvic floor muscles
- Lower yourself down onto your side and raise your legs at the same time
- Roll onto your back after your head is on the pillow.

**Sleep and rest with the bed flat as soon as you are comfortable to do so.**

# **Gentle Stretches**

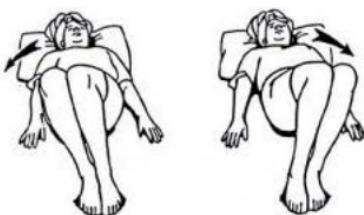
## **Pelvic Tilting**

- Tilt your hips so your low back flattens into the bed
- 



Hold for 5 seconds, then relax. Repeat 5 - 10 times in a row, \_\_\_\_ times a day.

## **Knee Rocking**



Gently rock your knees side to side 5 - 10 times, \_\_\_\_ times a day.

## **Pelvic Floor Recovery**

Pregnancy and birth can weaken the pelvic floor muscles. In the **first few days** after delivery, it is important to:

- Empty your bladder at least **every 3 hours**
- **Lean forward** while sitting to urinate and focus on slow relaxed breathing into your abdomen. **Pat dry.**
- Support your pelvic floor by **pressing up on your pad** when you **cough or sneeze**.
- Start **pelvic floor exercises**
- **Tell your midwife or physiotherapist** if you accidentally leak urine or stool or can't empty your bladder or bowel.

### **Recovery after vaginal delivery**

- Lie down with the **bed flat** as often as possible – this will reduce pain and swelling.
- Try to avoid prolonged sitting and standing. Sit on folded towels to minimise pressure on your perineum.
- Use **ice packs** for 20 minutes every 1 – 2 hours.
- Speak to your midwife/doctors about pain relief medication.
- After a bowel motion, spray your perineum with water (squirt bottle or handheld shower hose) and pat dry rather than wiping.

# Pelvic Floor Exercises

- Start these exercises **lying down** on your back or side.
- Gently tighten and pull up with the muscles around your vagina and anus, like stopping urine or wind. This **shouldn't cause pain**.
- Hold for \_\_\_\_\_ secs
- Totally relax these muscles for 1 – 2 breaths after each squeeze
- Repeat \_\_\_\_\_ times, or until your muscles start to feel tired
- Complete \_\_\_\_\_ times a day
- When able, do this in sitting and standing positions

**Goal:** Hold each squeeze for \_\_\_\_\_ secs, 10 repetitions, 2 – 3 sets, in a variety of positions, most days.

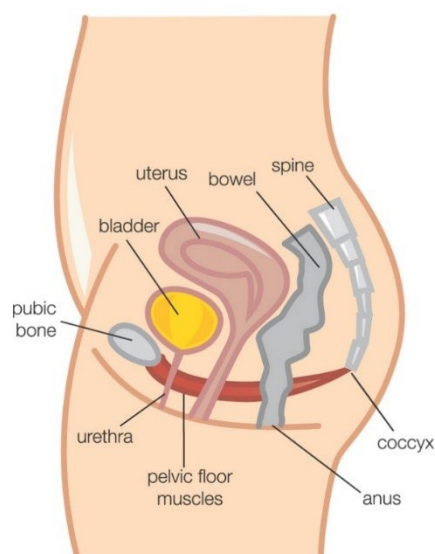
## **Tighten your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles when you:**

Cough, sneeze, laugh or blow your nose

Lift any heavy objects e.g., children, weights, prams, laundry baskets

Push or pull heavy things

Get in and out of bed



# Good Bowel Habits

It's important **NOT** to strain while passing a bowel motion as this can weaken your pelvic floor.

## For soft and regular bowel motions

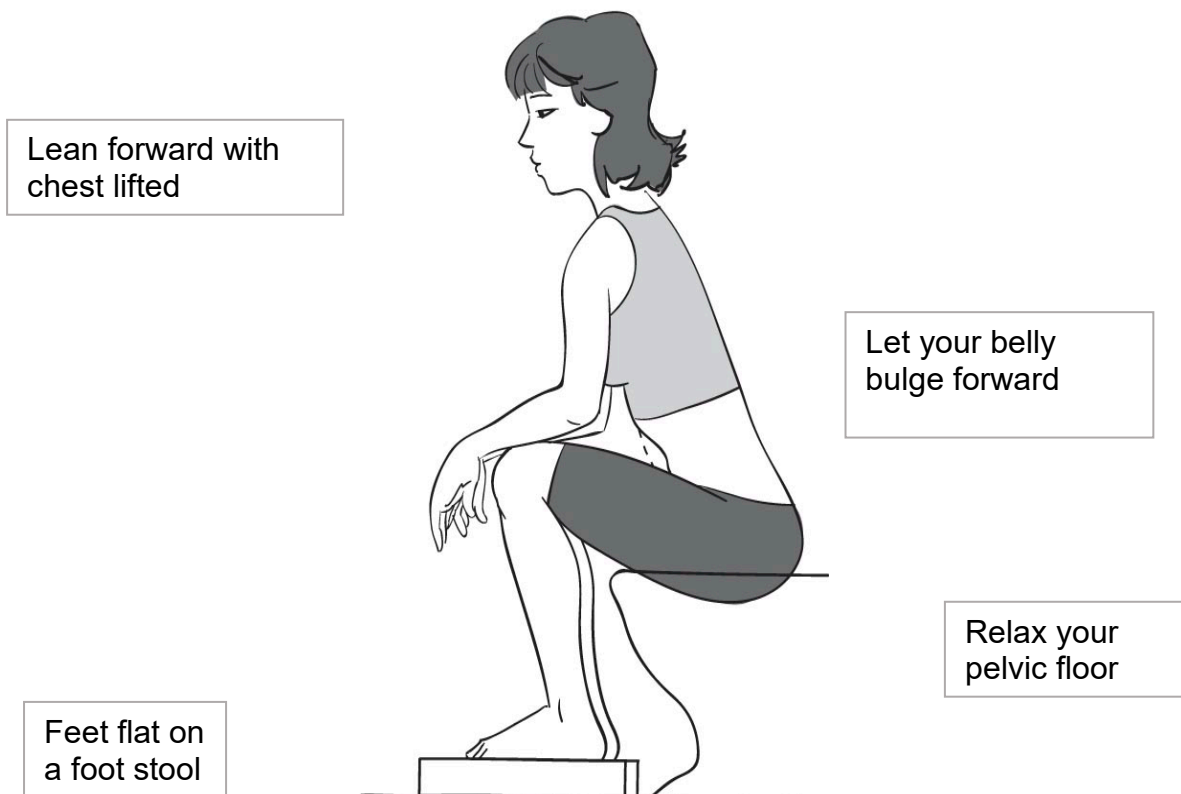
Drink at least **2 litres** of fluid per day

Eat food with **fibre**

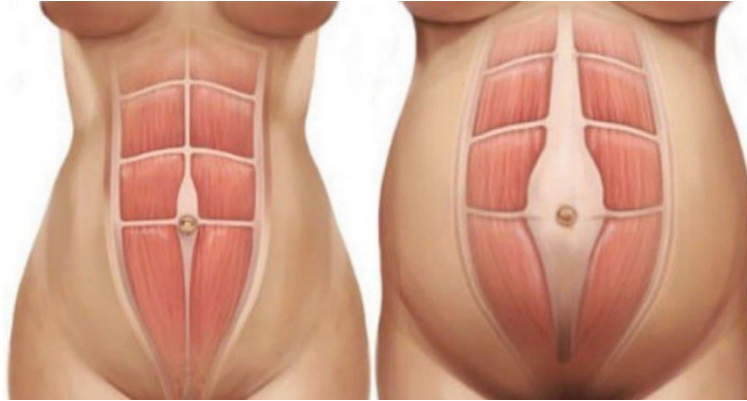
It is common to need **stool softeners** for the first few weeks – ask your midwife or doctor if you need these

## When you are passing a bowel motion

- Wait until you have an **urge** before going to the toilet and go within **5-10 minutes** of feeling the urge
- Use the position in the picture below when sitting on the toilet
- **Support** your stitches with your hand and a **wad of toilet paper or pad**
- Focus on letting your **abdomen bulge** out and **relax** your back passage



## **Abdominal Muscle Separation**



- It is **common** to have some stretching of your abdominal muscles
- If your physiotherapist finds a large abdominal muscle separation, you will be offered an abdominal **support band** to wear for **4-6 weeks**
- Alternatively, you can buy abdominal support tights or a belly band
- It is important to do **exercises to strengthen** your core 4-6 weeks after giving birth. See the back page of this booklet for details of the **Postnatal Class** we offer at the RBWH Physiotherapy Department.

## **Return to Sex**

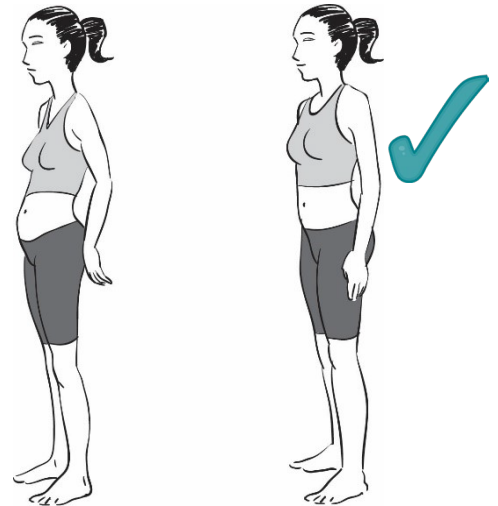
- For vaginal penetration, you should wait until bleeding has finished, scars are healed and you feel more comfortable. This can be different for every person.
- It is common for sex to feel different after birth due to hormonal changes, vaginal dryness and changes in sensation.
- The following tips can help when you return to having sex
  - Listen to your body
  - Use a good quality lubricant, especially if you are breastfeeding
  - Focus on deep breathing and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles
  - Try different positions to find what is most comfortable
  - Perineal scar massage
- If you have concerns, see your GP for a referral to the RBWH Physiotherapy Department



# Back Care

## Standing Posture

- Stand **tall** and draw your shoulder blades down and together
- Gently **draw in** your lower abdominal and pelvic floor muscles
- Hold up your tummy with your hands if your caesarean scar is sore



## Work Heights

- Avoid stooping down for repetitive tasks like changing nappies, bathing baby, hanging washing



## Safe Lifting

Safe lifting will help with protecting yourself from back injuries

- Stand close to where you are lifting with feet apart
- Draw in your lower abdominal and pelvic floor muscles
- Bend your knees
- Keep the object close to your chest
- **Don't lift anything heavier than your baby (or 5kg) for the first 6 weeks**
  - Avoid tasks such as heavy groceries, heavy laundry, vacuuming and mopping



# Feeding Posture

## Sitting

- Sit with your bottom well back in the chair
- Bring your baby **up to your breast** rather than bending down towards your baby
- Try **pillows** or breastfeeding **cushions** to support your baby and your arms
- **Relax** your shoulders down
- Try a **footstool**
- Try not to look down the whole time – look up and around



## Lying Down






- Try lying on your side if it is too painful to sit (eg. Sore stiches or tail bone)



## General Exercise

- Everybody recovers differently so it is important to **listen to your body**
- For good health, aim to do **30 minutes** of moderate intensity activity 5 days a week
- Please **contact your GP** if you are feeling the following while exercising:
  - **Heaviness/pressure/bulge/dragging in the pelvic area**
  - **Leaking urine or difficulty control bowel movements**

## Returning to exercise after birth

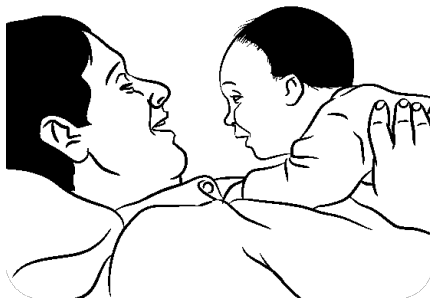
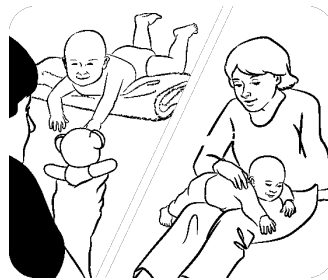
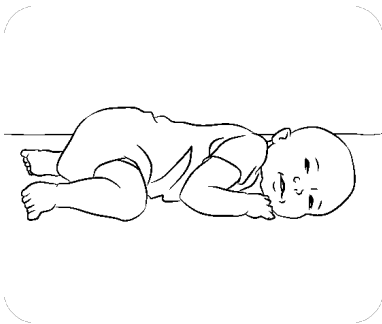
0-2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pelvic floor exercises in lying + sitting</li><li>• Hip/knee bends, knee rocking</li><li>• Walking (avoid hills)</li><li>• Upper body stretches i.e. shoulder rolls</li></ul>	
2-6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Body weight exercises; mini squats, shallow lunges, bridging</li><li>• Pelvic tilts in lying/4 point kneel, cat curls</li><li>• Progress pelvic floor exercises</li><li>• Progress walking distance</li></ul>	
6-8 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low impact cardiovascular exercise; cycling, cross trainer, power walking</li><li>• Postnatal yoga and Pilates classes</li><li>• Swimming, aqua aerobics, deep water walking</li><li>• Progress body weight exercises</li></ul>	
8-12 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Progress body weight exercises to include deadlifts</li><li>• Progress pelvic floor exercises to standing</li><li>• Progress intensity of swimming, cycling, power walking</li></ul>	
12+ weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Graduated return to running as advised by your physiotherapist</li><li>• Competition sports, weight training</li><li>• High-intensity group exercise as advised by your physiotherapist</li></ul>	

# For Your Baby

Babies learn through touch and movement.

## Tummy Time

- Give your baby tummy time up to **5 times per day** from birth when they are **awake**.
- Your baby might start by holding their head up for a few seconds. As they get older, they will hold their head up longer.
- **Practice tummy time** in lots of **different positions**
  - on a mat on the floor
  - on your chest
  - in the bath
  - over your arm
- Make sure someone is always watching them during tummy time.
- Remember: '**Back to sleep, tummy to play**'
- Pictured below are different ways to practice tummy time



## Protecting Head Shape

- Make sure your baby **turns their head to both sides**. If your baby looks to one side more, contact your GP for a referral to the Physiotherapy Department.

# **Classes**

We offer a number of classes to help with your **recovery after birth**

Classes are **free** if you are eligible for Medicare

## **Self-Referral Classes**

Call us on **3646 4319** to book yourself into the class!

### **Postnatal Class**

Tuesday 10:30 – 11:30am

- A class for new mums with back pain, abdominal muscle separation or seeking information on return to exercise
- Aim to attend 4 – 8 weeks after discharge from hospital

### **Baby Massage Class**

Monday 1:15pm – 2:30pm

- This is made up of 2 sessions
- Babies to attend between 4-13 weeks of age
  - Please use corrected age for babies born preterm
- The classes cover:
  - Massage strokes
  - Wind pain and massage
  - Baby development and play ideas
- Please bring your own massage oil
- Partners are welcome

## **Physiotherapist-Referral Class**

### **Pelvic floor telehealth class**

Tuesday 10:30 – 11:30am

- This class is for new mums who need extra help with pelvic floor recovery