



An tOspidéal Náisiúnta Máithreachais
The National Maternity Hospital

Physiotherapy Department

Advice and Exercise following Abdominal Surgery

Please read and bring this leaflet for your hospital stay



Following surgery it is important you allow your body some time to rest in order to recover.

Listen to your body, do not push yourself, your recovery is unique to you.

Do not expect too much too soon, be kind to yourself.

The key to recovery is to start small and build slowly.

Accept offers of help from friends and family in order to assist your recovery.



Visit our website: www.nmh.ie

Early Days

Comfort & Movement

Bed Mobility

Using the log roll technique can be useful. Bend both knees, feet flat on the bed, roll on to your side. Push your body up by pressing down on to the mattress with your hand, at the same time allow your feet to go down to the floor. Stand by leaning forwards and pushing up with your hands and legs. Try not to stoop; stand tall.



Chest Care

It is important to take 2-3 deep breaths hourly following surgery to allow full lung expansion. You may feel discomfort in the abdomen when you are doing breathing exercises, do not fear you will not damage the stitches or clips. Support the wound with a pillow/rolled up towel when laughing, coughing or sneezing to prevent pain.



Trapped Wind

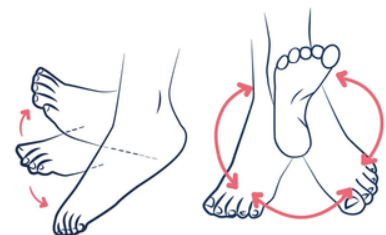
Some people experience discomfort in their stomach or shoulders from trapped wind.

The following may help:

- Massaging your stomach gently in a clockwise direction
- Lie on the bed with knees bent up and feet on the bed; roll your knees gently from side to side, in a comfortable range as your wound will allow.
- Walking and moving little and often.

Circulation

Moving your ankles and elevating your feet should help reduce ankle swelling, short frequent walks will also help your circulation and lung function.



Short Walks

In the early days, short frequent walks are good for circulation, promoting healing and reducing pain. Short walks also allow us to change position and prevent stiffness. You will be encouraged to begin short walks on the ward. This could be as simple as mobilising to the toilet and back.

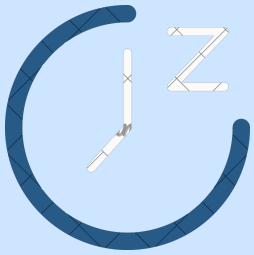
When walking for the first time after your surgery a nurse will accompany you for support.

Start small and gradually increase the distance, time and intensity as you continue to heal.

Think little and often in the early days.

Remember your body is recovering after you have your surgery. Don't expect too much too soon. Take it slow and remember everyone's healing timeline is different, don't compare your recovery to others.

Going Home



Rest

Remember it takes time to get over any surgery and it will take time for you to heal. Increase your level of activity gradually as you feel able to. You may feel very tired when you go home, so don't overdo it, pace yourself and limit your visitors.

Allow yourself time to rest and recover. It is important to take good care of yourself, you will be surprised how tired you feel in the next few days and weeks so take things at your own pace.



Managing Pain

It is helpful to continue to take *regular* pain relief (paracetamol) after your surgery as guided by your medical team.

Your nurse will guide you on your pain relief plan before your discharge from hospital.

Driving

You are normally allowed to return to driving at 6 weeks, check with your GP/doctor. You will need to inform your insurance company that you have had an operation.

Before your first journey, do a check: Do you feel comfortable to drive? Can you concentrate? Can you do an emergency stop without any pain? Put a pillow between the seat belt and your stomach for comfort on car journeys.

Exercise

Exercise has many positive effects on both your physical and emotional wellbeing.

Do not be afraid of exercise and activity because of your surgery. Think of all the movements you do on a daily basis. Normal movement is important for function.

Try to build a little exercise in to your day from soon after you go home. Start slowly and listen to your body.

Your aim is to simply move every day, whether that's a few stretches on the floor or a small walk.

- Walking is the safest and easiest type of exercise to begin with. Start slowly and build up speed and distance gradually
- It is safe to swim again once any wounds have healed. This may be following your six week check-up
- Low impact exercise is safe to resume after approximately 6-8 weeks, for example: Pilates and yoga
- High impact exercise such as aerobics, running, and resistance/weight training can generally be resumed gradually, no sooner than 12 weeks, but some people will take a little longer.

Try to be in tune with your body, if any exercise feels uncomfortable or painful or if you are experiencing any leaking, don't continue and seek advice from a healthcare professional.

Sex

It is preferable to wait six weeks until your post-op check up to ensure stitches are fully healed. Resume intercourse when you feel ready and understand that this may take time.

Be patient with yourself and open with your partner about how you feel.

Housework

- Avoid activities that cause strain to your abdomen during the first few weeks, e.g. prolonged standing.
- Accept offers of help with housework
- In the first 6 weeks try to avoid hoovering and heavy lifting, e.g. a basket of wet washing.

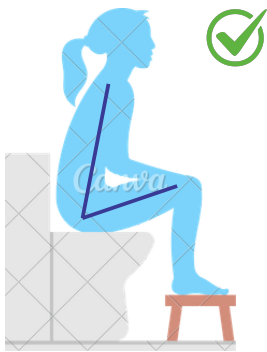
Bowel & Bladder Care

Bowels

It is very common for women to be nervous about opening their bowels after surgery but there is no need to be fearful. These steps can help your bowels stay regular.

- Try not to miss meals. Eat breakfast to allow your digestive system time to work before you have to leave the house.
- Don't delay going to the loo once you have the urge to empty your bowels
- Don't rush; give yourself time to go
- Ask your doctor about any medications you are prescribed. Some may be causing constipation, so you may need to make allowances for this.
- Avoid relying on laxatives; use for short term only.

Avoid fighting the urge to open your bowels to avoid constipation. **The following will help you to comfortably pass a bowel motion:**



- Use a foot stool to ensure your knees are higher than your hips
- Maintain a straight back avoid slumping
- Lean forward resting forearms on thighs
- Practice your deep breathing to help the pelvic floor relax
- Swell your tummy rather than straining - imagine you are blowing out birthday candles or saying the word "OOooo"
- **Relax and don't rush**

Avoiding constipation is important following your surgery. **The following can help soften the consistency of your stool can help with stimulating digestion:**



1 Variety of fruit and veg



2 Daily fibre in your diet (30g: eg nuts, veg, chia seeds, flax seeds)



3 Regular fluids (~2L water)



4 Movement & exercise

Bladder

Sometimes you may not feel when your bladder is full and if bladder emptying is delayed this may result in leakage urine. We can manage this by:

- **Scheduled voiding** = going to the toilet every 2hrs even if you have no sensation to pass urine
- **Double voiding** = after the flow of urine stops, stand up and sit down again to ensure the bladder is fully emptying



Exercise for Recovery

Active Cycle Breathing Technique

The ACBT is a cycle to help you clear secretions from your chest. The ACBT uses different types of breaths to make it easier to clear secretions by loosening them and shifting them from the outer part of your lungs towards the main airways.

It is important that you are in a comfortable, supported position with your shoulders relaxed. Upright sitting is recommended, it can also be performed in side lying, follow your therapists' instructions.

Technique

Breathing Control

- Rest one hand on your abdomen so that you can feel it rise and fall with your breathing.
- Breathe in gently through your nose, feeling your hand rise and your lower chest expand.
- Breathe out gently allowing your shoulders to relax down. The breath out should be slow, like a "sigh".

Deep Breathing

- Breathe in deeply through your nose if you can, feeling your lower chest expand as far as possible. Try to keep your neck and shoulders relaxed.
- Hold the breath for up to three seconds.
- Breathe out gently through your mouth. The breath out should be long and slow like a sigh
- Repeat this step 4 – 5 times.

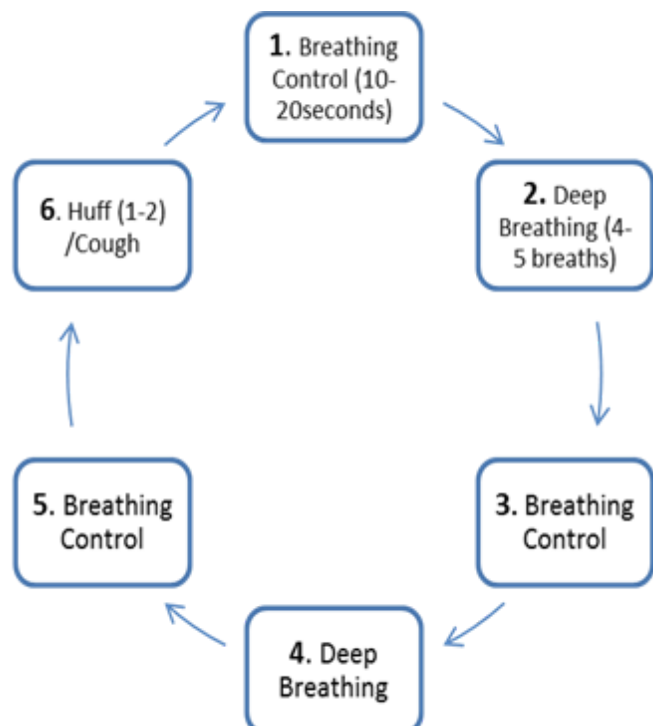


Huff

- This is a short sharp breath out through an open mouth that helps to force the secretions out.
- To perform this, tilt your chin up, take a medium sized breath in then follow this with a short, sharp breath out. Imagine you are trying to fog up a mirror.
- Remember the huff needs to be through an open mouth, using your abdominal muscles.

Cough

- Cough if you feel the secretions are ready to be cleared.
- Long bouts of coughing can be tiring and ineffective, begin cycle again if unable to clear secretions.



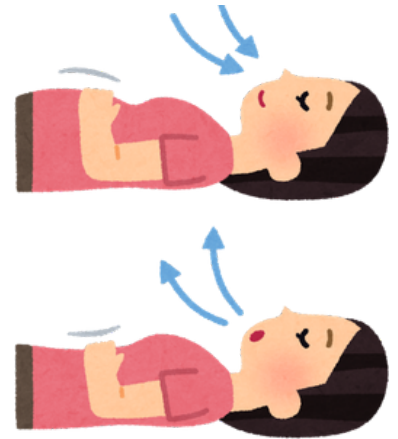
Diaphragmatic Breathing

Correct breathing lays the foundation for healing and strengthening through your 'core'. By "just breathing" in the early days following surgery you begin the healing process, gently moving your deep abdominals, diaphragm and pelvic floor. It allows you to build the core foundation you need for daily movements, to prepare your body for returning to exercise and manage stress and anxiety.

The diaphragm is the muscle that sits just below your lungs. Your diaphragm and pelvic floor move up and down like a piston while you inhale and exhale. This is called diaphragmatic breathing.

By slowly breathing all the way into the lower lungs and letting the tummy flop out, this helps to relax the pelvic floor. In turn, on exhalation, the pelvic floor is activated.

Practice 10-15 deep breaths throughout the day in lying or sitting



Abdominal Exercises

Your tummy muscles help to support your back and pelvis. After surgery, it is important to strengthen your tummy muscles to help support your bowel and bladder.

Steps to help protect & strengthen your tummy muscles:

- Minimise excessive pressures on your tummy and pelvic floor such as heavy lifting or constipation, especially in the first few weeks
- Supportive clothing can be helpful to support your tummy muscles throughout the day, it can also be beneficial to wear supportive clothing during exercising
- Follow return to exercise advice after your surgery

Here are some beginner exercises that you may find helpful. These exercises should feel comfortable and pain free

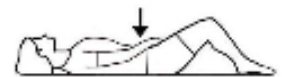
Deep abdominal muscles

- Place your hands on your stomach below your belly button.
- Breathe in through your nose, and as you breathe out draw your stomach in away from your hands towards your spine.
- Relax the tummy muscles and repeat



Pelvic Tilt

- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Tilt your pelvis by gently flattening your back into the bed.
- Hold for 3- 5 seconds breathing normally, then relax. Repeat



Knee Rolling

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Gently engage your tummy muscles
- Inhale to prepare and as you exhale gently roll your two knees to the left side
- Inhale to come back to the middle
- Exhale to roll the knees down to the opposite side. Repeat



Abdominal Exercises

Arm Opening

- Lying on your side.
- Breathe in and reach the upper arm forward and up.
- Breathe out as you bring the arm back and over behind your back.
- Pause for a second, breathe in and bring the arm up and forward, breathing out as you return to the starting position
- Do not force it. Follow your hand with your eyes



Leg slides

- Lie on your back with your knees bent, pull in your stomach and tighten your pelvic floor muscles.
- Gently slide one leg out straight and return.
- Repeat with other leg.



Single knee fall out

- Lie on your back with your knees bent, pull in your stomach and tighten your pelvic floor muscles.
- Keeping your pelvis still and stomach pulled in, allow one knee to slowly drop out to the side.
- Slowly bring your knee back to the middle.
- Repeat with the other leg.



Cat and Cow stretch

- Kneeling on all fours, hand under your shoulders and knees under your hips
- Inhale to prepare
- As you exhale engage your lower abdominal muscles and arch your back up towards the ceiling with your tailbone and head down. Try to stretch out any areas of the spine that are stiff
- Press your hands in to the floor and feel the stretch extend in to your upper back and shoulder blades
- Slowly return to start position



Clam

- Lie on your side with knees bent and feet together, pull in your stomach and tighten your pelvic floor muscles.
- Lift your top leg moving your knees apart but keeping your feet together, keep your pelvis still throughout
- Slowly return to the starting position.
- Repeat with the other leg.



Please see below a link to our YouTube videos which correlate to the exercises in this leaflet:

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLttO1pYTORo0K6jWQpJHpJPKwwfI82dG->

Return to Exercise

0-12 weeks advice

The following is not a prescriptive plan but provides advice around returning to activity safely after surgery and ideas to help you get started.

You should be completely symptom free with any exercise you choose to do. If you experience any pain, you should stop immediately and seek advice from your medical team or physiotherapist. Do not ignore these symptoms.

Whatever stage you choose to return to activity after your surgery, you should always begin at Week 0.

Week 0 to 2

- Active Cycle Breathing Technique
- Abdominal exercises as above
- Walking - gentle cardio exercise, increase distance and speed incrementally

Week 2 to 6

- Progress abdominal exercises
- Increase walking distance / duration / intensity

Week 6

- Introduce low impact exercise e.g., Pilates, yoga or stationary bike

Week 6 to 8

- Increase walking intensity e.g., power walking
- Increase duration / intensity of low impact exercise
- Introduce functional strengthening exercises e.g., squats to help with performance of day-day tasks

Week 8 to 12

- Introduce swimming (providing wound healing complete).
- Able to introduce higher intensity static aerobic activity e.g., spinning
- Gradually increase resistance (bands or free weights) during core / lower limb exercises - start light and increase as able

From week 12:

- Progress exercise as able, increasing weights and intensity

Useful Apps:

Click the icons below to access:

