



An tOspidéal Náisiúnta Máithreachais
The National Maternity Hospital

Physiotherapy Department

Advice & Exercise Following Caesarean Section



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

It is important to look after yourself, so you can look after your baby.

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.

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

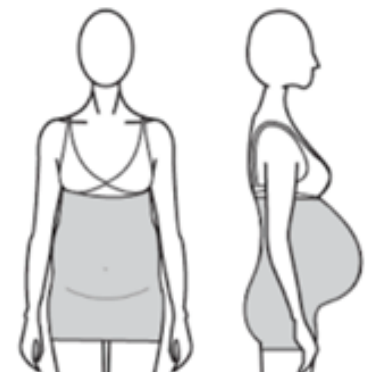
It is important to take 2-3 deep breaths hourly following a c-section to allow full lung expansion.

Support your stomach with a pillow/rolled up towel when laughing, coughing or sneezing to assist your abdominals



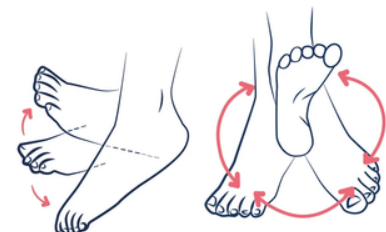
Supportive Clothing

Supportive clothing or a breathable abdominal support such as a Tubigrip can provide comfort in the early days post birth.



Circulation

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



Shoulder Tip Pain

Pain in your shoulder can occur after c-section, it is referred pain from your diaphragm and should settle in a few days. Heat or peppermint water can help.

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, support your stitches with the other hand.
- 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.
- Ask your midwife for some peppermint water.

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 postnatal ward. This could be as simple as mobilising to the toilet and back.

When walking for the first time after your c-section a midwife 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 baby. Don't expect too much too soon. Take it slow and remember everyone's healing timeline is different, don't compare yourself to others.

Early Recovery Video

Click on the icon to access our early recovery video:



Wound Care



A caesarean section incision involves seven layers of tissue: Skin, Fat, Fascia, Abdominals, Peritoneum, Uterus, Amniotic sac.

It typically takes six weeks for your c-section wound to heal, there are still changes happening to the deeper layers of tissue up to two years after your surgery.

The stitches may begin to feel slightly irritated but this is normal during the healing process. The following are **ways you can help yourself recover**.



Rest and preventing infection

Rest will help your body recover and heal from the birth. Try to rest when baby sleeps or as able throughout the day. You may not be able to sleep throughout the day but even taking a few moments to lie flat, relax and allow your body to rest can help.

Keep the area clean and dry to prevent infection.

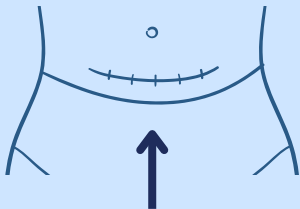
To help reduce irritation of your stitches, allow some moments during the day with your wound exposed to air. This can help with healing.



Managing Pain & Swelling

It is helpful to continue to take *regular* pain relief (paracetamol) after your surgery as guided by your obstetric team. Your midwife will guide you on your pain relief plan before your discharge from hospital.

Once your wound has healed (normally 6 weeks) you can start some scar massage. This can be helpful if the area is still sensitive or feeling tight as it can help with scar tissue mobility as it heals.



[Click here](#)

Scar Massage

Scar Massage can begin 6 weeks post surgery, the wound must also be fully healed. Click on the icon on the left to access our scar massage leaflet. It can also be found on the physiotherapy section of The National Maternity Hospital website.

Going Home



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.

Positioning

Looking after your back

It is important that you take care of your back in the weeks following birth. Being a new mother means there are lots of things to lift and carry that you may not of had before. You need a strong back to protect yourself against injury.

Your back is more vulnerable to injury for the first 5-6 months after birth. Starting with good habits and implementing the following strategies for simple tasks like feeding, changing and lifting your baby as they grow can help to prevent back pain. Don't worry, back pain is very treatable if it does occur.

Feeding



- Sit in a comfortable chair with your back and thighs well supported.
- Placing your feet on a foot stool can help you sit back into the chair and support your back
- A chair with arms may provide you with more support.
- Place pillows on your lap to bring the baby up to the level of your breasts/bottle to avoid slouching.
- Try to rest back when you're feeding and relax your shoulders.
- Lying on your side can also be a comfortable position for feeding.



Changing & Bathing

- Adapt working surfaces to waist height to prevent you from stooping over and developing backache, e.g using changing tables.
- Bathe your baby on a surface at the right height for you.
- It will be easier to lift your baby from this height rather than having to lean down and lift.

Lifting - early days & as they grow

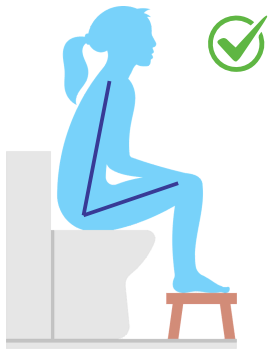
- Try to avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby during the first 6 weeks.
- Bend from the knees and breathe out as you lift your baby
- Keep your baby close to your body as you lift up.
- Accept help from others. Perhaps they can lift the baby to you in the early days.
- Minimise picking up younger children/toddlers in the early stages; rather encourage them to climb up to you while you are sitting.

Bowel & Bladder Care

Bowels

It is very common for women to be nervous about opening their bowels following birth but there is no need to be fearful. 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 birth. **The following can help soften the consistency of your stool can help with stimulating digestion:**

1



Variety of fruit and veg

2



Nuts and seeds in the diet
(chia seeds, flax seeds)

3



Regular fluids (water)

4



Movement & exercise

Bladder

1 in 3 women experience some degree of bladder leakage following birth

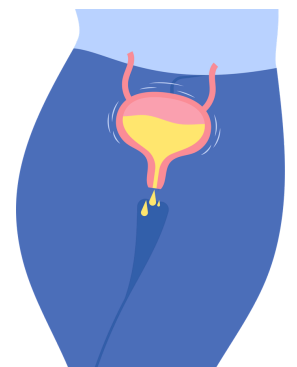
Sometimes after birth the sensation of the bladder can be reduced. You may not feel when your bladder is full and if bladder emptying is delayed this may result in bladder leakage. We can manage this by:

- **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

You can self refer to the Physiotherapy Department at The National Maternity Hospital for 6 months following your birth for any pelvic floor concerns.

Email: physio@nmh.ie

Next we will discuss pelvic floor exercises which can help to prevent these issues.



Pelvic Floor

After a caesarean section birth, it is still important to practise your pelvic floor exercises as pregnancy can weaken these muscles. A strong pelvic floor also helps your deep abdominal muscles to heal.


It is common to have some mild pelvic floor symptoms in the initial days to weeks, these should resolve with time. Pelvic floor dysfunction is not limited to leaking. This may include bladder or bowel control issues, feelings of pressure or heaviness in your vagina or persistent pain with sex.

If you are experiencing any of these ongoing symptoms you should seek help. You can self-refer to postnatal Physiotherapy Service up to 6 months after birth. **Email: physio@nmh.ie**

Exercises

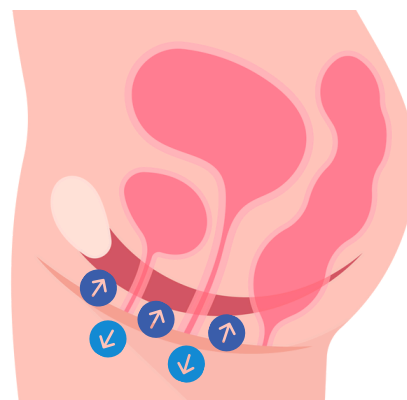
After a caesarean birth it is important to practise your pelvic floor technique first to make sure you can fully contract and relax your pelvic floor muscles. Each movement is equally important. If you feel tension in your pelvic floor muscles your focus is more on breathing and releasing.

Technique

Gently squeeze shut your back passage (as if holding back wind), your vagina (as if gripping a tampon) and your urethra (as if stopping your flow of urine) 

Draw your pelvic floor inwards and upwards. Do this without tightening your buttocks, without holding your breath and without squeezing your legs together.

Release - let the muscle fully relax releasing all tension. 



'Magnificent 10'

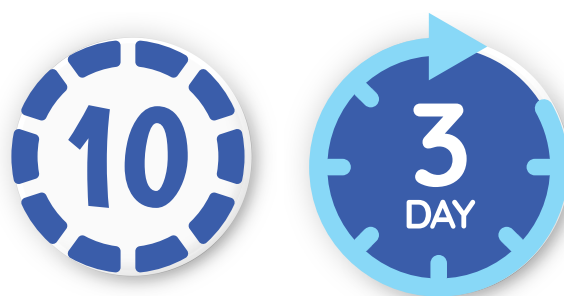
Your aim is to be able to do 10 holds of 10 seconds each and 10 fast contractions. Three times a day. Start in lying and as able progress to sitting or standing

Begin by holding for a couple of seconds and gradually each week build-up to the 'magnificent 10'.

It is important that you keep breathing naturally whilst doing the exercises.

Give yourself time between squeezes to let go of the pelvic floor muscles completely.

Squeezy is a useful app by the NHS to help with your exercises. **Click the squeezy icon to download.**



Abdominal Retraining

Breathing & Tummy Muscles

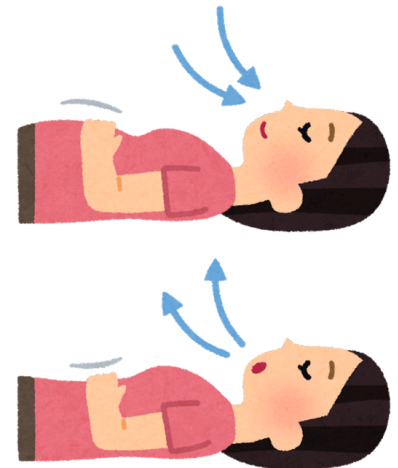
Diaphragmatic Breathing

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.

Correct breathing also lays the foundation for healing and strengthening through your deep abdominals.

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



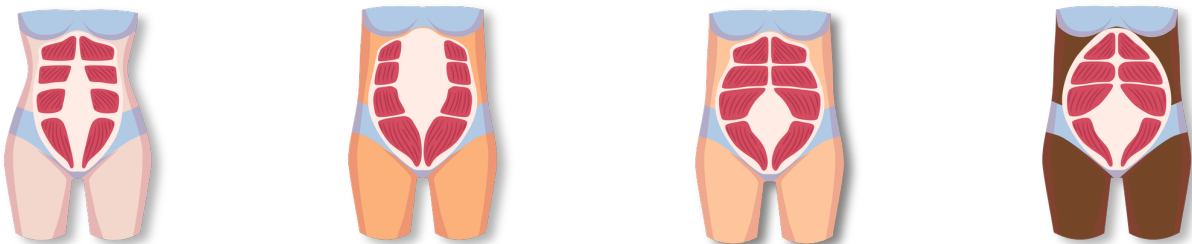
Tummy Muscles

A diastasis recti is simply the name given to the stretch of your tummy muscles during pregnancy. There are different variations outlined below. A diastasis is a very normal and natural process during pregnancy and happens to all pregnant women, it is also normal for this to remain while you are healing postnatally.

A lot of the natural healing happens within the first 12 weeks after birth, however you may still feel weak in your tummy muscles after this time. There are changes happening in your body for months after birth, and regaining strength in your tummy can depend on your activity levels.

Your tummy muscles may never return to pre-birth appearance and this is normal.

Remember It is amazing what your body has achieved to accommodate your growing baby over 9 months, it needs equal time to heal.



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 postnatal return to exercise advice
- Here are some beginner exercises outlined in the links below (click on the symbol to bring you to the link)



Return to Exercise

0-12 weeks advice

The following is not a prescriptive plan but provides advice around returning to activity safely after delivery and ideas to help you get started. **Whatever stage you choose to return to activity postnatally, you should always begin at Week 0.**

Week 0 to 2

- Gentle pelvic floor activation (once catheter is removed) focus on gentle squeeze and release for healing
- Basic abdominal exercises - [Diastasis rehab series video 2](#) - *foundations of movement*
- Walking - gentle cardio exercise, increase distance and speed incrementally

Week 2 to 6

- Progress pelvic floor activation - gradually increase length of holds / reps, continue throughout programme
- Progress abdominal exercises - [Diastasis rehab series video 3](#) - *progressions of movement*
- Increase walking distance / duration / intensity
- Consider introduction of body weight movements e.g., squats, lunges and bridging

Week 6

- Gentle Abdominal scar massage - following 6 week GP check and fully healed.
- Introduce low impact exercise e.g., Pilates, yoga, cross trainer 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., deadlifts to help with performance of day-day tasks

Week 8 to 12

- Introduce swimming (providing bleeding has stopped & abdominal 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, no heavier than your baby and increase as able

From week 12:

Before returning to running / high intensity exercise you must be able to complete the following without any pelvic heaviness, bleeding, incontinence or moderate pain (3/10 or less)**.

Walking	30 mins	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single leg balance	10 sec (each side)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single leg squat	x10 (each side)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jog on spot	1 minute	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forward bound	x10 repetitions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single leg hop	x10 (each side)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Running man	X10 repetitions	<input type="checkbox"/>

** You should be performing your pelvic floor exercises in standing - 10 x 10 sec, 10 fast, 3 x day

Useful Apps:

Click the icons below to access:



Healthy Bodies
after birth playlist:





The National Maternity Hospital

HEALTHY BODIES AFTER BIRTH

An information session on caring and reconnecting with your body as it recovers after birth

Topics include:

- Bladder & Bowel Care
- Abdominal Care
- Pelvic Floor Advice
- Returning to Movement
- and more!

Every Friday at 11am

Online



Physiotherapist led information session
Email njordan@nmh.ie to book your place

www.nmh.ie