

POSTNATAL EXERCISES AFTER A VAGINAL BIRTH



Postpartum Parent Support Program

Information Sheet

Canada

After a vaginal delivery, healthy activity will help your body to return to normal.

For exercises to be most effective:

- 1) Practise on a firm surface several times daily. You can begin slowly, 3-5 times a day and work up to 10-15 times each exercise.
- 2) Exercise slowly and smoothly, and avoid holding your breath.
- 3) Relax and breathe deeply between each exercise.
- 4) Avoid long, tiring sessions.
- 5) Gradually increase your exercise program. Avoid vigorous exercises (jogging, skipping, etc.) until after your postpartum checkup.
- 6) If you feel pain, stop exercising. Begin again only after the pain has stopped.

I Pelvic Floor Contraction Exercise (Kegel)

Advantages:

- 1) Aids in healing of episiotomy and haemorrhoids, decreases pain, increases the blood supply and helps to restore bladder tone.
- 2) Strengthens pelvic-floor muscles which have been stretched during your baby's birth.
- 3) Helps prevent prolapse or slipping of the uterus in later life.
- 4) May add sexual enjoyment during intercourse.

You can begin these exercises very soon after giving birth. The exercises can be done a few times a day, five contractions or tightenings at a time. There are two types of Kegel contractions:

Wave - When you are sitting, standing or lying, tighten the muscles around your vaginal and rectal openings (called the pelvic floor muscles) as if to stop the flow of urine. Hold for 3-5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Elevator - Tighten the muscles around your vaginal and rectal openings a little more on each count of 5. Relax for a count of 5. Repeat 5-10 times.

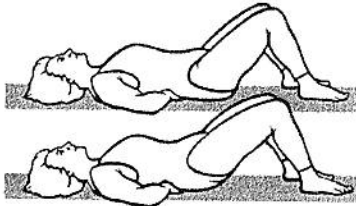
These exercises can be repeated several times during the day; while standing doing dishes or ironing, while lying in bed or while sitting watching television.

Continuing to do these exercises as a part of your daily routine will help to keep the muscles that support your vagina, uterus, bladder and bowels firm and in good shape.

II Pelvic Tilt Exercise

Relieves backache and improves posture.

- Lying on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, place hand in hollow of back, tighten your abdominal muscles and flatten back against your hand. Hold and count to three, and relax. Repeat five times, and when you are able, increase this number.



- Sitting on a chair with your back against the back of the chair, tighten your abdominal and seat muscles; push the small of your back into the chair. Hold and count to three, and relax.
- Standing with your back against the wall, heels 13 cm to 16 cm (5 to 6 in.) from the wall, tighten your abdominal and seat muscles, pressing the small of your back against the wall.
- For good posture, repeat pelvic tilt in standing position. Hold the pelvic tilt and walk around. Try to maintain this good body alignment and check it daily in front of a mirror. When lifting objects from the floor, plant your feet shoulder width apart. Bend your knees, keep your back straight and bring the load in close to your body.

III Exercises for Abdominal Muscles

- 1) Strengthens abdominal muscles giving support to your back.
- 2) Helps you regain your figure.

Hormones circulating in pregnancy cause the central or middle seam of the abdominal muscles to soften and some women may notice a separation of the muscles.

Before progressing to Exercises for Abdominal Muscles do the following check:

Lie on the floor with knees bent. Slowly lift your head and shoulders (keep chin tucked in) off the floor. Feel the separation in the abdominal muscles just above, at, or below the navel or belly button. If you can fit three fingers or more in the separation (a bulge in the central or middle abdominal area is usually seen), do the corrective exercise that follows.

Corrective Exercise for Separated Abdominal Muscles

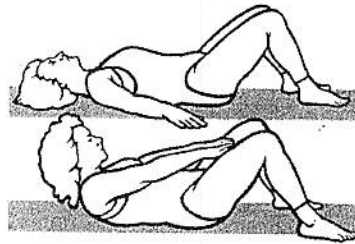
- Lie on your back with knees bent.
- Cross your hands over the abdominal area so that you will be able to support the abdominal muscles.

- As you breath out, slowly raise your head and shoulders off the floor until just before the bulging of the muscles appears.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Slowly lower.
- Build up to 10 times, 5 times daily.

Avoid exercises that rotate or turn the trunk, twist the hips, or bend the trunk to one side.

Once you can fit only 1 or 2 fingers in the gap, you can progress to the following *Exercises for Abdominal Muscles* listed below.

- Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor.



- With arms outstretched toward your knees, push small of your back into floor, tighten your abdominal muscles, and lift head, shoulders and upper back off the floor. Hold and count to three at first, progressing to longer holds.
- Slowly uncurl downward so your head is the last to touch the floor.
- Cross-over in the same starting position with arms outstretched toward your knees, push small of your back into the floor, tighten your abdominal muscles, and reach across to the outside of opposite knee. Hold and count to three, and slowly return to starting position. Repeat five times to each knee, alternating sides, and increase number of repetitions as you are able.

You may find it helpful to also continue practising relaxation techniques as part of your exercise program. Relaxation is as important now as it was during pregnancy.

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Health Canada

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