

Physiotherapy advice following hysterectomy, repair and other gynaecological operations

Petter Day Treatment Unit / King George V Ward

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

Exercises

Day 1 onwards

To reduce the effects of a general anaesthetic, practise the following exercises hourly throughout the day.

Deep-breathing exercises

Be sure that you have adequate pain relief, because deep breathing could be uncomfortable. Practise the breathing exercises sitting up in bed, supported by pillows, or out in a chair.



Take a deep breath in through your nose, hold for two seconds and then sigh the air out of your mouth. Repeat four times then try to 'huff' the air out.

Huffing

Take a deep breath in, then breathe out quickly and forcefully through your mouth as if you were steaming up a window. This will help loosen any phlegm if needed.

Coughing

- Be sure that you can cough strongly and effectively if needed after your operation to clear any excess secretions. Don't worry, your stitches and staples are very secure.
- You may find it more comfortable to cough in the same position as for your deep-breathing exercises. Support your abdominal incision by holding a small towel or pillow firmly over your tummy. If your operation is through the vaginal route, place a hand over the pad between your legs.

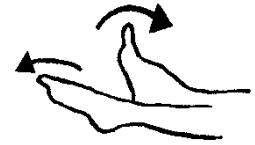
Circulatory exercises

These are designed to improve circulation in your legs whilst lying in bed or sitting in a chair.

Try to do the following exercises every hour:

Ankles

Bend and stretch the ankles up and down firmly and quickly. Repeat 10 times.



Knees

Tighten your thighs by pushing the backs of your knees down against the bed. Repeat five times.

Buttocks

Tighten your buttocks regularly to relieve pressure from your bottom. Repeat five times.

From day 2 onwards

Start all exercises by lying with your head on a pillow, knees bent and a shoulder-width apart, feet flat on the bed.

1. Abdominal exercise

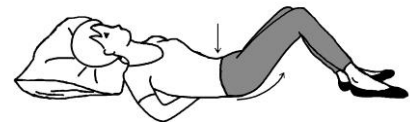
Gently place your hands on your lower tummy. Breathe in through your nose and, as you breathe out, gently pull your tummy away from your hands towards your back. Feel the muscles tighten, try to hold for a count of three and then relax. Breathe in and out normally.



Practise this exercise three times a day. You will gradually be able to hold for longer until you reach 10 seconds and can repeat 10 times.

2. Pelvic tilting

Place your hands in the hollow of your back. Tighten your tummy muscles (Exercise 1), flatten your lower back onto your hands and tilt your bottom. Breathe normally. Hold for three seconds and release gently.



Try to progress this exercise by tightening your tummy muscles and also pulling up your pelvic floor before continuing as above.

3. Knee rolling

Tighten your tummy muscles (Exercise 1) and gently lower both knees to one side as far as is comfortable. Bring them back to the middle and relax. Repeat to the other side.



4. Knee bends

Tighten your tummy muscles (Exercise 1). Keep your back flat on the bed and bend one hip and knee up as far as is comfortable. Try to hold up to the count of 10 and then replace the leg, so the foot is back on the bed. Repeat with the other side.

Repeat each of these exercises four times, three times a day, and then do more as you feel able.

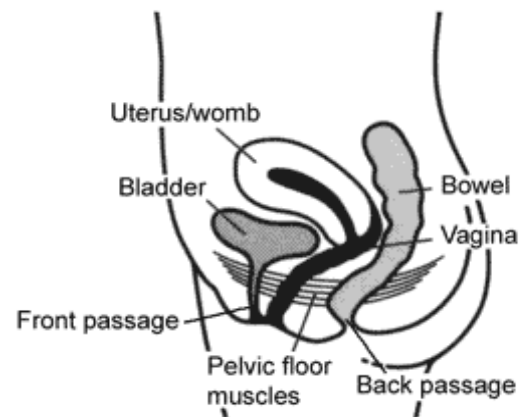
The pelvic floor muscles

What and where are they?

The pelvic floor muscles are at the bottom of your pelvis. They attach to the pubic bone at the front to the coccyx (tail bone) at the back.

What does the pelvic floor do?

The muscles of the pelvic floor work like a hammock, to support the pelvic organs (bladder, womb & bowel). The pelvic floor muscles also help close the outlets from the bladder and bowel, keeping you clean and dry.



Strong pelvic floor muscles can also help increase sexual enjoyment.

Why do I need to exercise my pelvic floor?

All muscles need to be exercised to stay strong. The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened in several ways:

- Childbirth and pregnancy
- Excess weight
- Chest problems causing coughs
- Long-term constipation
- Ageing
- Gynaecological surgery

Strengthening the pelvic floor can improve bladder and bowel control, and also support the pelvic organs, helping to prevent prolapse.

How do I find my pelvic floor?

Sit comfortably on a firm chair and try to keep breathing normally. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind by pulling up the back passage. Try to avoid clenching your buttock muscles.

Now imagine that you are pulling your back passage up inside towards your navel (tummy button) as though it is in a lift.

Exercises

To strengthen the muscles

Hold at the top of the 'lift' for up to 10 seconds. Release and rest for five seconds. Try to breathe normally. You may feel your tummy muscles tighten, which is fine.

Repeat as many times as you can (up to 10).

To make the muscles work quickly, when you need them

Pull the muscles in quickly and let go again, 10 times

This is your set of exercises, which you should practise three to four times a day.

Remember:

Set aside times to do the exercises when you are not busy with something else. If you are washing up or driving, you can't concentrate properly.

A full set must be done each time, to work well.

When you can do the exercises well while sitting, try doing them standing up.

To improve the tone of the muscles

Pull in the same muscles, but only half way up the lift. Hold for as long as you can, eg while waiting for the kettle to boil, traffic lights to change to green, or whenever you walk from your front door to the car.

This can be done as often through the day as you like.

Using the muscles

When you are going to do something which causes pressure in your abdomen, such as coughing or lifting, it is important to get into a habit of pulling in your pelvic floor muscles immediately before and trying to hold them until you stop.

Other things you can do to help your pelvic floor muscles

- Lose weight if you need to (check with your GP for advice)
- Avoid constipation
- Avoid heavy lifting where possible

Increasing your general fitness is important - try cycling, walking or swimming - but it is advisable to avoid high-impact exercise, such as trampolining and sit-ups.

Final thought

It takes three to six months to strengthen pelvic-floor muscles with regular training. Don't be disheartened if improvement is slow, and don't give up!

Just like any other muscles in the body, the pelvic-floor muscles will go weak again if not exercised regularly. Therefore these exercises must become as much a part of your daily routine as brushing your teeth!

To get out of bed

Bend both knees and roll onto your side by moving your shoulders and knees together. Push up by pressing your upper hand down onto the bed while you lower your feet to the floor.

Sit on the edge of the bed and then stand by pushing up with your legs and hands.

Posture and back care

It is very important to be aware of your posture and to take special care for about six weeks after your surgery. A good posture will help prevent backache.

Sitting

Sit upright in a supportive chair, with both feet on the floor. Do not slouch. You may find it helpful to place a small cushion or rolled towel in the small of your back to give support.

Standing or walking

Avoid holding your tummy with your hands and slouching forwards. Stand upright with shoulders back, and bottom and tummy tucked in.

Lifting

Do not lift heavy objects. Try to pull up your pelvic floor, tighten your tummy muscles and breathe out as you lift.

Remember to bend your knees and keep your back straight. Hold larger objects close to your body.

- If you are suffering from back pain after your operation, seek further advice from your physiotherapist.
- If any exercises cause pain, discontinue and seek advice from your physiotherapist.
- Your consultant may also advise you to practise pelvic floor exercises, as outlined above.

Before you go home

The need for continued pain relief at home is very individual. Please discuss this with your nurse.

If you have any worries or concerns, please talk to the physiotherapist or nursing staff on the ward.

Advice on discharge

Exercises

Continue with exercises taught for at least six weeks, preferably three months.

Rest

Take a daily rest on your bed for about an hour. Continue for as long as necessary.

Walking

This is a very valuable exercise. Try to walk for about 20 minutes at least once a day. Hills and stairs are quite safe, but build up speed and distance gradually.

Driving

Check with your consultant but do not expect to drive for about four or six weeks, depending on your surgery. Make sure you can wear a seatbelt comfortably and perform manoeuvres and an emergency stop without undue pain.

Work

You should not expect to return to full-time work until after your post-op appointment with your consultant (six weeks). Always get approval from your doctor to return to work.

Sports

You should not take part in any sports until after your post-op appointment. Ask your consultant for advice at this appointment.

Gardening

Avoid gardening for a few weeks. Start slowly.

Sexual intercourse

You should refrain from sexual intercourse for about six weeks.

Household activities – Dos and don'ts

Dos

Independent personal hygiene; light housework, such as dusting, ironing, making drinks; washing and drying dishes; preparing light meals.

Don'ts

Decorating; heavy lifting; shaking the duvet or heavy bedding; cooking a large meal using the oven; heavy housework.

Take things slowly. Be very careful for the first six weeks after your operation. Gradually build up activity over the next six weeks until you feel able to resume your normal lifestyle.

If you need to talk to someone after you have returned home, please telephone Petter Day Treatment Unit on **01271 322722** or King George V Ward on **01271 322720**.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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