

Sitting up in bed

Make sure your back is well supported with pillows, especially the hollow of your back. Bending your knees will take the strain off your tummy.

To get out of bed



Exercise

There are many good reasons for exercising once your baby is born. You should return gradually and enjoy it. You should do the exercises in this leaflet and continue with them once you are at home.

Becoming active as soon as possible after the delivery may mean there is less chance of developing post-natal depression, providing exercise relieves the stress rather than increasing it.

The hormones can affect your joints for up to six months after the birth, or for as long as you are breastfeeding, so care should be taken not to start high-impact activity too soon.

If you have a catheter, it is advisable to wait until it is removed and you are passing urine normally before starting pelvic floor exercises.

W\ mXc I bYYX hc Yl YfWjgY a mdYj JWZccf?

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

Strengthening the pelvic floor can improve bladder and bowel control, and also support the pelvic organs, helping to prevent prolapse. Strong pelvic floor muscles can also help increase sexual enjoyment.

Hck Xc I ZbX a mdYj JWZccf?

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.

PYj JWZccf Yl YfWjgYg

1. To strengthen the muscles

breathe normally. You may feel your tummy muscles tighten, which is fine.

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

2. To make the muscles work quickly, when you need them

Pull the muscles in quickly and let go again. Repeat 10 times.

Practise these exercises at least three or four times a day. To maintain improved performance throughout life, continue to exercise regularly.

Set aside times to do the exercises when you are not busy with something else. If you are

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.

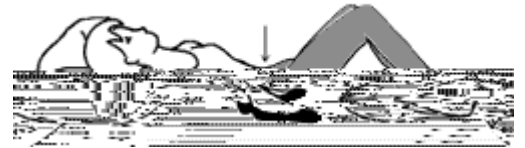
Using the muscles

When you are going to do something which causes pressure in your abdomen, such as coughing, lifting or sneezing, 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.

During pregnancy, as your baby grows, your tummy muscles naturally lengthen and stretch sideways. A gap can form between these muscles, called divarication of rectus abdominus. This gap, usually about 5cm wide, gradually closes up after the birth. It is important to take care with the following exercises and to ensure that your tummy does not **bulge** or **dome** at all. If it does, stop the exercises and continue with the abdominal-hollowing exercise only. You may need to ask your GP for a referral to a physiotherapist.

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The next exercises are also helpful in relieving wind and nausea after a caesarean delivery.



Getting up and moving around

Being active is good for you. Get up and move around as soon as possible unless you are advised otherwise.

Look after your back – this is good advice for life

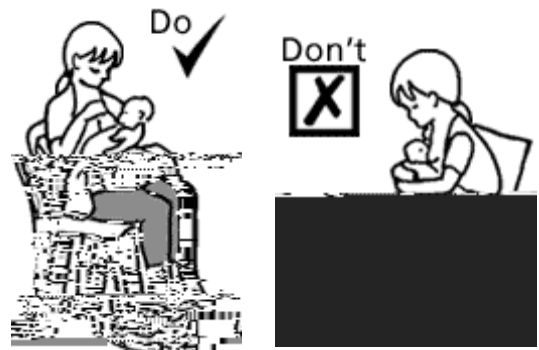
A good posture is important in lying, sitting, standing or walking. It may improve the way you feel, and help to prevent aches and pains.

Your pelvic joints can take between three and six months to return to normal, and possibly longer if breastfeeding. You can easily strain your back during this time, so take care with posture and exercise. Begin with gentle exercise, build up your fitness and do not start too soon with high-impact activity, such as aerobics classes.

Back pain is often caused by slouching when feeding your baby and stooping when changing your baby's nappy. Remember to maintain an upright posture.

Sitting and feeding

Always sit well back in the chair or on the bed. A small pillow or folded towel behind your waist may help to alleviate any backache you have. Your feet should reach the floor. Pillows on your lap will bring the baby level with your breast if you are breastfeeding, or high enough to avoid stooping if you are using a bottle. Rest back, making sure your shoulders are relaxed.



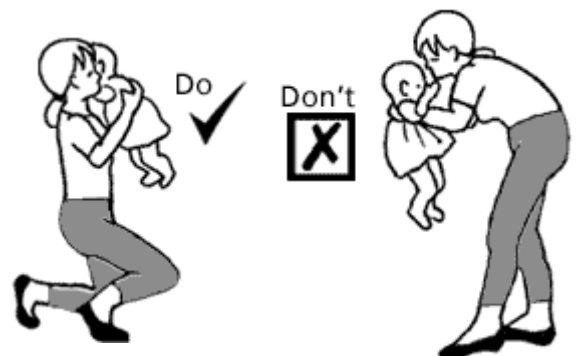
Remember, you can also feed your baby whilst lying on your side, in the comfortable resting position as described above.

Lifting

Try to avoid or minimise any heavy lifting in the first few weeks.

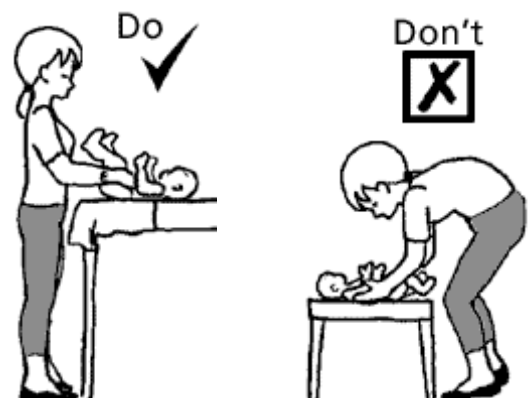
Try to tighten your pelvic-floor and tummy muscles, and to breathe out as you lift.

Remember to keep your back straight and your knees bent when lifting.



Changing your baby

The surface on which you change your baby should be at waist height, so you do not have to bend forward, risking backache. It is also easier to lift your baby from this height.



Sexual intercourse

Some women prefer to wait until their GP check-up at six weeks before resuming full intercourse. However, if there are no problems, you can resume intercourse when you feel ready. Start gently and use lubrication if required. If you have persistent pain or discomfort during intercourse, seek advice from your GP.

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Extra information

If you have had a caesarean, you should follow all of the above advice. However, because you have had abdominal surgery, you will be more tired. Do not expect too much, too soon.

There are several layers of stitches in your abdomen that will take time to heal, so gradually increase your activity levels as you feel able.

Take pain relief for as long as you require to allow you to move comfortably

When you return home, accept all the help that is offered

Try to avoid activity that causes strain for the first six weeks; this includes prolonged standing, hoovering or carrying heavy shopping/loads.

Try not to lift anything heavier than your baby for the next six weeks. If you have a toddler, encourage them to try to climb up to you whilst sitting, rather than bending forwards to pick them up.

Walking

all the way back again. Ensure the pram handles are at the correct height, so you do not have to bend forwards or reach upwards.

Driving

Wait until you feel strong enough and can concentrate. If this is before your six-week check-up, check with your insurance company that you are covered. Make sure you can wear a seatbelt comfortably and perform manoeuvres and an emergency stop without undue pain. If possible, take someone with you on your first journey.

Exercise and sport

Wait until after your six-week check-up. Begin with the gentler forms of exercise, such as walking and swimming. Build up your fitness gradually. Avoid aerobics classes and competitive sports for three months. Listen to your body – stop if it hurts.

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If you experience continued symptoms of pelvic girdle pain, backache or bulging of your abdominal muscles, request a referral to your local physiotherapist.

If you experience symptoms of bladder or bowel leakage, or uncontrolled loss of wind, you may need to be seen by a specialist continence therapist. Your GP, midwife or health visitor should be able to refer you to the appropriate team, if required.

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.

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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.

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