FIT for MOTHERHOOD

Advice and exercise for new mothers following vaginal or caesarean delivery

ASSOCIATION OF CHARTERED PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN WOMEN'S HEALTH
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Introduction

The following advice applies to all new mothers whether you have given birth vaginally or by caesarean section. It includes a safe and effective set of exercises and some practical advice to aid your recovery including:

- being comfortable after your delivery
- moving easily around the ward and at home with your baby
- exercising the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles
- starting to get back to normal and finding your previous level of fitness

After you have given birth, it is natural that you will want to give your baby lots of attention. Even so, it is important to take a little time for yourself. Although you cannot expect to return to full pre-pregnancy fitness immediately, there is a lot you can do now to help get yourself back into shape. By regaining your fitness, you will feel good and have more energy – and possibly avoid problems later.

If you need more advice after reading the leaflet, please contact your local women's health physiotherapist in the hospital where you have had your baby (see page 12).
Comfort after your delivery

(If you have had a caesarean delivery please also see page 5)

Rest
After having your baby it is vital to have sufficient rest to recover. Use a method of relaxation if you have learnt one and sleep whilst your baby sleeps.

Comfortable resting position
Lie on your side and make yourself comfortable by placing pillows under your abdomen and between your knees.

This position is comfortable for most women, especially if you have had painful stitches in either your abdomen or bottom and/or 'piles'. You can also use the position for feeding your baby.

To turn in bed from lying on your back:
Bend both knees, one at a time, keeping your feet on the bed. Support the abdomen with your hand especially if you have had a caesarean delivery. Make sure that you move your shoulders and knees at the same time as you roll onto your side.

To get out of bed:
Bend both knees, keeping your feet on the bed and roll onto your side moving your shoulders and knees together. Push your body up by pressing down onto the mattress with your upper hand, allowing your feet to go down to the floor. Sit on the side of the bed for a few moments, and then stand by leaning forwards and pushing up with your hands and legs. Try not to stoop; stand tall.
To get into bed:
Stand with the back of your knees against the bed. Support your abdomen with one hand and put the other hand on the bed behind you. Bend forwards slowly as you sit on the bed. Lower your head and shoulders sideways down onto the pillow, keeping your knees bent and together, lift your legs up at the same time.

If sitting is uncomfortable you can get into bed by kneeling on the bed and then lowering yourself down onto your side.

Sitting and feeding
Always sit well back in the chair or bed. A small pillow or folded towel placed behind your waist will support you and may help to relieve backache; your feet should reach the floor. Pillows on your lap will bring the baby up to the level of your breasts for a comfortable feeding position. Rest back as you feed making sure that your shoulders are relaxed.

Remember you can also feed your baby whilst lying on your side in the good resting position described above.
Activity in the early days after delivery

Being active is good for you. Get out of bed and walk around as soon as possible unless you are advised otherwise.

Changing your baby

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

Bathing

Avoid bending forward and straining your back, by kneeling down if you are washing the baby in your bath. Alternatively your partner can pass your baby to you when you are in the bath. If you are standing make sure that the baby bath or sink is at waist height and wrap a towel around the sink taps to protect the baby.

Circulation

- if your ankles are swollen, put your feet up with your knees supported
- when you are resting in bed or sitting in a chair, bend your feet and ankles up and down briskly for 30 seconds every hour
- avoid sitting or lying with your legs or ankles crossed as this may restrict the blood flow
- avoid standing still for long periods
**Posture**

Regaining good posture after you have had a baby is important; this will help the way that you look and feel. Standing, sitting, lying or being active with good posture may help to avoid future aches and pains.

**Caesarean delivery**

**Extra Information**

You should follow all the above advice. However, because you have had an abdominal operation you will be more tired; do not expect too much too soon.

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

- take regular pain relief for as long as you require it
- in the early days if you need to cough, sneeze or laugh, lean forwards, supporting your wound - with your hands, a pillow or small towel
- when you return home, accept all the help that is offered
- try to avoid any activity that causes strain for the first 6 weeks e.g. prolonged standing, vacuuming, carrying heavy shopping bags
- try not to lift anything heavier than your baby for at least 6 weeks. If you have a toddler, encourage him/her to climb up to you while you are sitting down rather than bending forward to pick him/her up

Before driving again – check with your insurance company that you are covered: this will normally be 4-6 weeks after caesarean delivery. Take another driver with you on your first journey, and before you drive ensure that you

- are able to concentrate as normal
- can wear a seatbelt comfortably
- can look over your shoulder and turn the steering wheel without discomfort
- can perform an emergency stop without undue pain. Try it out by applying the footbrake hard whilst the car is stationary