

Caesarean Section

Care, Advice & Exercise

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy

<https://cwmtaf.wales/pelvic-health-physiotherapy>



Congratulations on the birth of your baby/babies!

A Caesarean birth is major abdominal surgery and involves a transverse incision (horizontal cut), approximately 12-15cm long and about 2.5cm above the pubic bone.

It takes time to recover after a C-section and every woman is different.

You should see the external scar heal within the first 6 weeks, but it can take three to six months for the uterus and deep abdominal muscles to fully heal.

This booklet will give you valuable information for your recovery.

Pain relief

It's normal to feel pain and discomfort after your caesarean section and the best way to control this is to have regular pain relief. Having your pain well controlled will help you move around more easily. Please ask your midwife or GP for pain relief.

Although early movement is recommended, regular rests and listening to your body is important as doing too much too soon will can slow down your recovery.

Finding alternative ways to move can be helpful e.g. to get in and out of bed, roll on to your side and push yourself up using your arms. This can be a more comfortable way of getting out of bed in the early days.

We encourage women to get up and out of bed as soon as they feel they can (within the first 12-24 hours) as this helps with circulation, reduces risk of deep vein thrombosis and helps with passing wind and having a bowel movement.

Catheter

You would have had a catheter inserted during your time in theatre. It is usually removed 12 hours after your caesarean section.

You should aim to pass urine on the ward within the first six hours of it being removed. When you need to go for your first wee, make sure you tell your midwife as it needs to be measured. Drinking plenty of fluid will help the sensation of wanting to pass urine. Sometimes sitting on the toilet with the tap running can also help.

Wound care

You will have a dressing across your wound that remains there for about 5 days unless it gets wet or saturated with blood.

Things that can help you feel more comfortable:

- Wear loose clothing and cotton underwear
- Taking regular pain relief if the wound is sore. It is advised to take paracetamol or ibuprofen (but not aspirin) if you are breastfeeding, but please speak to your Midwife or GP regarding pain relief
- Poor nutrition has been linked to delayed wound healing so make sure you are eating a healthy balance diet
- Stay hydrated, this will also assist in your wound healing and help you avoid constipation
- Look out for signs of infection - redness, heat around the wound, green/brown discharge, pain (especially at rest), developing a high temperature, feeling generally unwell

** If you think you may have an infection please contact your Midwife or GP **

Returning to normal activities

Make sure you take things slowly, listen to your body and aim to do a little bit more each day. Rest is also very important. It may be a good idea to make sure someone is at home to help with some of your daily activities as it can take up to 6 weeks to feel comfortable.

Short walks are a great way to start rebuilding your strength and activity levels. Start with slow, short walks and gradually increase as you feel able to. Remember to stand tall with shoulders relaxed and avoid stooping forward.

The following exercises will be the building blocks of your returning to previous activity levels. They are low level, gentle and designed to be safe and comfortable for these early days & weeks after a caesarean section delivery. Strengthening your pelvic floor muscle in combination with the deeper lower abdominal muscles is crucial to returning to any form of activity.

We recommend that you avoid high impact exercise until at least 12 weeks postnatally to allow your body to heal and help to avoid injury.

If you do too much too soon, you are likely to feel more tired, be more aware of pain and potentially take longer to get back to your normal. There are lots of gentle exercises you can do in order to build gently up to higher impact activities.

If you would like more advice on how to progress and returning to activity / exercise please contact the pelvic health physiotherapy team or check out the link below which will take you to a week by week guide on progressing back to running, if this is your goal:

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bjasm/2019/05/20/ready-steadygo-ensuring-postnatal-women-are-run-ready/>

Exercises

It is safe to do these exercises after you've had a caesarean section. If you start gently they should not be uncomfortable.

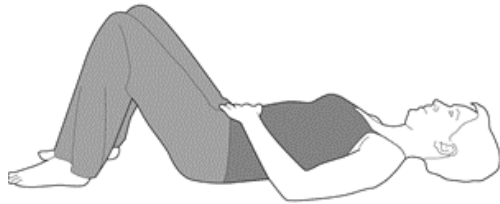
1. Deep lower abdominal exercise

Your deep lower abdominal muscles form a natural corset and support your back and internal organs. Following pregnancy these muscles are weakened.

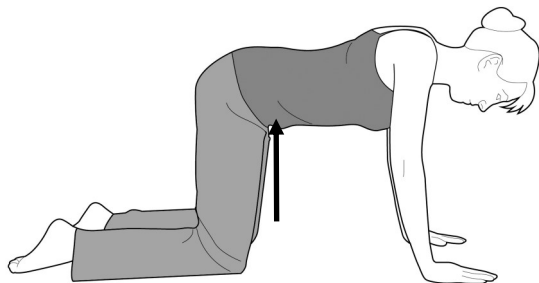
Try this exercise to help.

Lie on your back with your knees bent. Make sure you are fully relaxed. Breathe in to prepare, and when you breathe out gently draw your deep lower abdominals in towards your spine.

Hold this for 3-5 seconds. If you find this comfortable slowly increase the hold to 10 seconds. Repeat as many times as you feel comfortable. Aim for 5-10 repetitions.



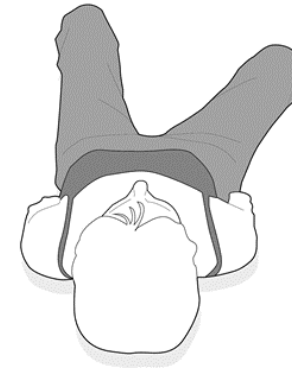
Start doing this exercise in your most comfortable position then progress to more challenging positions such as on your hands and knees or sitting with your back well supported. You can then progress to standing.



2. Hip exercise

Lie on your back with your knees bent. Make sure you are relaxed. Breathe in to prepare, and when you breathe out gently draw your deep lower abdominals in towards your spine and move one knee out to the side. Breathe in and bring your knee back to the middle. Repeat on the other side.

Use your abdominal muscles to keep your hips level and stop them rotating to the side as your leg moves out. Aim to do 5-10 each leg.



3. Leg lengthening exercise

Lie on your back with your knees bent. Make sure you are relaxed. Breathe in to prepare, and when you breathe out gently draw your deep lower abdominals in towards your spine and slide one foot along the floor to extend one leg away from you. Breathe in and slide your foot back to bring your leg back to the starting position.



Try and complete these exercises 2-3 times everyday.

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISE

The pelvic floor muscles have several jobs including:

- Keeping you continent
- Supporting the pelvic contents
- Providing spinal and pelvic stability
- Contributing to sexual function & sensation

HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

It is important to do the exercise correctly and **not to** allow other muscles nearby to join in:

- Tighten around the back passage as if to stop passing wind
- Then squeeze as if stopping a wee
- If possible, aim this squeeze upwards and forwards (by trying to draw the back passage towards the pubic bone)
- Finally, make sure you fully release & let go of the muscles

SLOW SQUEEZES

Squeeze your pelvic floor and hold for a few seconds, making sure you fully let go after each squeeze. Try and hold until your pelvic floor muscles get tired and do as many repetitions as you feel you can.

Stop if you can feel other muscles trying to join in.

Aim to hold for 10 seconds and repeat this 10 times with a 5-10 second rest in between each hold.

It may take some time to build up to this level, so build up the hold length and number of repetitions gradually, perhaps starting with:-

Squeeze & hold for 5seconds, relax for 5seconds

Repeat this 5 times

FAST SQUEEZES

Squeeze quickly and immediately let go fully.

Repeat this as many times as you can, stopping when your pelvic floor muscles tire or when other muscles try and join in.

Squeeze & immediately let go, repeat this 5-10 times in a row

If you do not stick to your exercise program or under do it, you will not make an improvement.

Remember, PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT & your program will need to be progressed as you improve to get the greatest gains. Speak to a pelvic health physiotherapist for more advice.

The KNACK & FUNCTIONAL use

Remember to squeeze your pelvic floor muscles as tight as you can before any sudden movement including coughing, sneezing, lifting or anything which might normally cause you to leak. This may take a lot of practice to master.

If your pelvic floor is to be of any use to you when you really need it, you have to learn to squeeze it and breathe at the same time. This can be tricky at first but will improve with practice - ideally breathe out as you hold the squeeze and progress to breathing in and out as you hold the squeeze.

You also need to be able to squeeze your pelvic floor in a range of positions such as lying, sitting, standing, walking and during your other daily activities. If this is difficult, lying is a good place to start as it tends to be the easiest position, but don't forget to progress to more challenging positions.

CHECK YOUR TECHNIQUE

It is easy to use the wrong muscles when starting out, so it's important to perfect the technique early on. Avoid tightening your:

Abdominal muscles

Adductors (inner thigh muscles)

Gluteal (buttock muscles)

Diaphragm (by holding your breath)

You can **check your technique** in several ways:

1. **LOOK** - use a full length mirror to ensure that no other part of your body is moving or holding. You can also use a mirror to observe the vagina & anus to ensure this area is puckering & slightly drawing inwards. If you see any bulging towards the mirror, stop & speak to your Physiotherapist.

2. **FEEL** - place a finger or thumb into your vagina then do a pelvic floor squeeze. You may feel a gentle tightening around your finger and your finger might be lifted in an up & forward direction. Don't worry if you don't feel anything, your muscle may need to strengthen more before you can feel it.

3. **TEST IT** - can you stop the flow of urine in the middle of a wee? We only advice you try this once a month as more often could potentially prevent you from fully emptying your bladder.



Download the Squeezy app to help you remember to do your pelvic floor exercises 3 times every day

Scar massage

Once your scar is healed, this is around 6 weeks, you can begin gentle scar massage. By doing this it can help with scar pain, tenderness and over sensitivity.

Do not commence scar massage until the wound is completely healed.

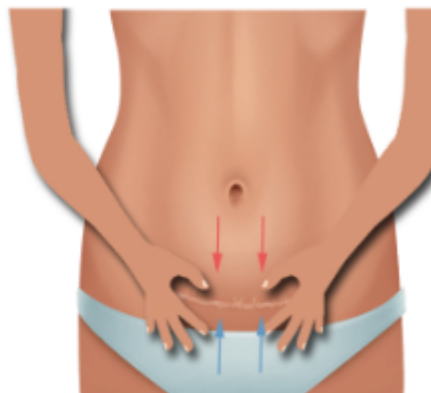
Aim to carry out scar massage for around three to five minutes every day. Make sure you are comfortable and relaxed before starting eg. lying down or half-sitting. Placing a warm compress over your stomach can help relax your muscles. Using non-scented moisturiser or oil can help move along the scar more easily.

Start at one end of the scar, keeping your index and middle finger together, draw small figures of 8's along the length of the scar then repeat in the opposite direction for 60 seconds. Repeat x2-3.

Pressure should be gentle to start so should not cause any discomfort and increasing pressure as any sensitivity settles.



Place both thumbs above the scar and spread all your fingertips out underneath the scar. With your thumbs gently stretch down towards your pubic bone following with your fingertips gently stretching up towards your belly button. You are aiming to move in an up down motion. Slowly repeat this x 2-3 for 60 seconds.



Place your index finger and thumb from the same hand above and below the scar. Repeat with the other hand. Gently pinch and lift the scar up and away from your body. You should be feeling a gentle stretch. Hold for 20-30 seconds. Repeat this along the scar approximately 3 times.



If you are experiencing scar hypersensitivity it is important that you do not avoid touching the area. Try and touch the area with different textures as this will help de-sensitise it.

When to seek medical advice:

Contact your midwife or a GP straight away if you have any of the following symptoms after a caesarean:

- Severe pain
- Leaking urine
- Pain when peeing
- Heavy vaginal bleeding
- Your wound becomes more red, painful and swollen
- Discharge of pus or foul-smelling fluid from your wound
- A new cough or shortness of breath
- Swelling or pain in your lower leg



Physiotherapy Appointment booking:-

Princess of Wales - 01656 752898

All other hospitals - 01443 471515

Royal Glamorgan Hospital Physio Dept - 01443 443277

Ysbyty Cwm Cynon Physio Dept - 01443 715014

Princess of Wales Physio Dept - 01656 752898