

Exercises and advice after gynaecological surgery

Women's Health Physiotherapy

Information for Patients

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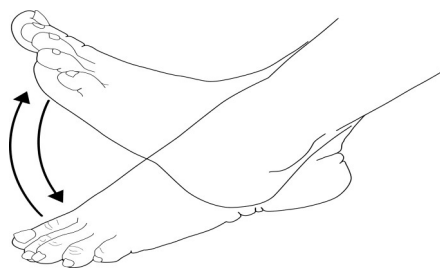
Introduction

This leaflet will give you some basic advice about recovering after your operation. The advice you will be given will depend on your operation, and the things you need to get back to. If you have any questions about your recovery, please speak to a member of staff on the ward.

Early exercises

These exercises will help to improve the blood flow in your legs, and reduce the chance of blood clots. Try to do these as soon as you wake up after your operation, whilst lying in bed.

1. Move both feet up and down briskly at the ankles.
2. Press both knees down on to the bed. Tighten your thigh and bottom muscles. Hold for a few seconds, and then relax.
3. Bend 1 knee, by sliding your heel towards your bottom. Move each leg 1 at a time.
4. Repeat exercises for about 20 seconds every 30 minutes (half hour).
5. Do not cross your legs as this can slow your circulation.



**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Breathing exercises

After an anaesthetic, until you become more mobile, it is important to take deep breaths to help reduce the risk of a chest infection.

- Take a deep breath in, taking the air down to the bottom of your ribs.
- Hold the breath for a count of 2 seconds.
- Sigh it out.

Repeat 3 times an hour. This will help loosen any mucus in your chest.

Coughing

Most people feel they need to cough after an anaesthetic. This may be uncomfortable, but your stitches will not come undone.

It is important that you take your pain relief regularly.

The most comfortable and best way to clear your chest is to “huff” (a short, forced breath out through the mouth, as if you were steaming up a mirror).

After vaginal surgery, give support between your legs by applying hand pressure over your pad. Take 2 to 3 deep breaths, hold firmly and “huff.” Spit out any mucus.

After tummy (abdominal) surgery, gently press your hands over the wound or press a pillow to your tummy. Take 2 to 3 deep breaths, hold firmly and “huff.” Spit out any mucus.



Getting out of bed

Depending on your operation, you may be able to get out of bed on the same day of your operation, if not it will be the next morning. Nurses will help you to do this until you are well enough to manage this on your own. Following the method below will help to protect your operation site if you have had tummy surgery. It will also make getting out of bed less painful.

1. Bend both your knees and roll on to your side.
2. Let your legs to slide over the edge of the bed.
3. Push up on to your elbow, using your hand from the opposite side to help you sit upright.

Carry on doing this for up to 6 weeks after your surgery, to protect your stitches and back.

When you stand up, you may feel some tightness over the operation site. Your stitches will not come apart, so be brave! Stand up straight, as much as you can.

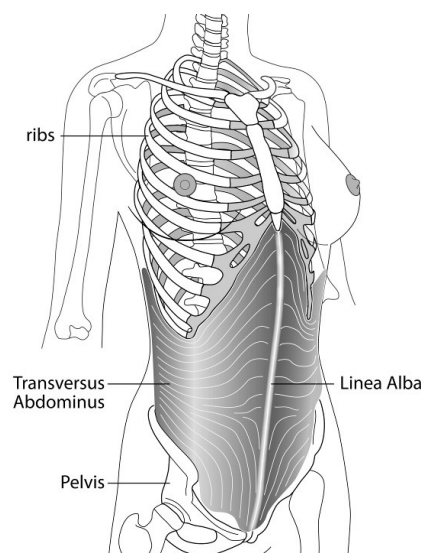
Whether you are in bed or in a chair, make sure your back is well supported. Placing a small pillow or roll in the small of your back may increase your comfort and help prevent backache.



Exercises for tummy muscles

Deep abdominals

If you have had tummy (abdominal) surgery, these muscles will be affected. Getting these muscles working early on will help with your discomfort, and assist with healing.



To do this exercise you should:

1. Lie comfortably on your back with knees bent.
2. Place your hands on your tummy and take a deep breath in, letting your tummy rise.
3. As you breathe out, draw your lower tummy down, away from your hands and towards your back.

Hold this for 5 seconds, keep breathing normally, and then relax. Repeat 3 times. As your strength improves increase the hold to 10 seconds and repeat 10 times.

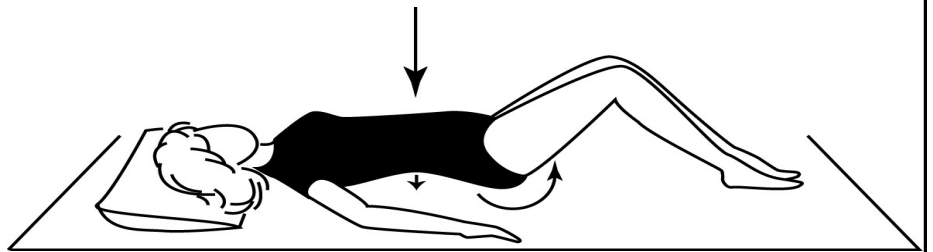


Exercises to reduce back and pelvic discomfort

Your back may feel achy after your surgery. You may also suffer with trapped wind, or constipation, which may be quite uncomfortable. These exercises will help to relieve these symptoms.

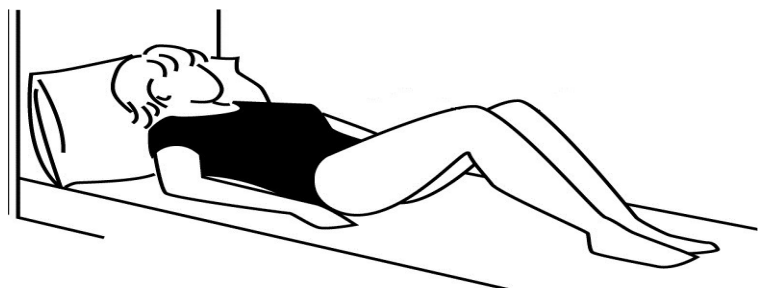
Pelvic tilting

1. Start by drawing in your deep tummy (abdominal) muscles.
2. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles and buttocks. This tilts your pelvis under, by flattening your back into the bed.
3. Hold this tilted position for 5 seconds and relax. Continue to breathe normally. Repeat 10 times.



Knee rolling

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent.
2. Pull in tummy muscles and take both knees slowly to 1 side as far as comfortable. Bring them back to the middle. Repeat on the other side.
3. Repeat 5 to 10 times, 2 times a day if comfortable.



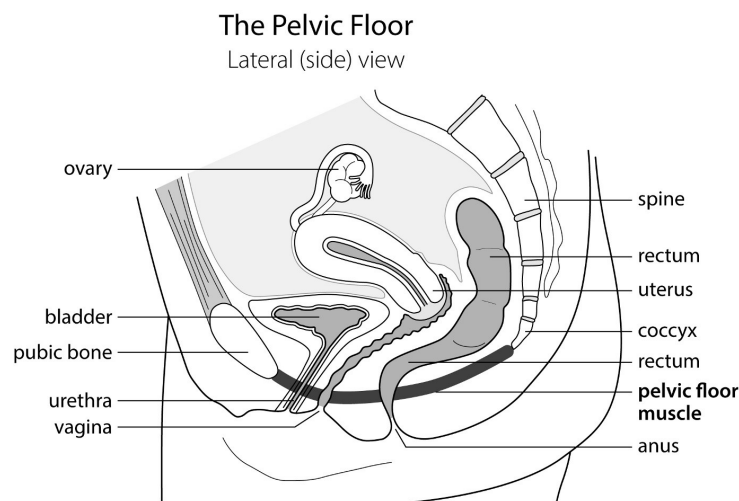
Pelvic floor exercises

The “pelvic floor” is a group of muscles found deep inside the pelvis.

They run from your pubic bone at the front, to your tailbone at the back, and between your sitting bones.

The pelvic floor forms a “sling” which supports your bladder, bowels and womb. Your operation site will also be supported by this muscle.

It is important to exercise this muscle, especially after pelvic or vaginal surgery. Exercising this muscle will help to reduce pain, help with healing, and also help with the control of your bladder and bowel. It will also help to prevent the organs in your pelvis from moving down from their natural position (prolapse).



To help you find the correct muscles:

Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind, and at the same time trying to stop your flow of pee (urine).

Aim to squeeze from the back passage, and “squeeze and lift” towards the front.

Long squeezes

- Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles as tightly as you can, for as long as you can. Make a note of how long you can hold for. Slowly increase up to 10 seconds.
- Completely release and **rest** for at least 4 seconds, or longer, until you feel the muscle fully release.
- Repeat the above, as many times as you can, or until your muscles are tired. Make a note of how many times you can repeat the hold. Slowly increase until you can do 10 long holds.

Short squeezes

- You should also do short, fast squeezes fully pulling in and fully relaxing between each one. Make a note of how many you can do. Slowly increase up to 10 short squeezes.

- Repeat these exercises 4 times per day.

You should not pull in your tummy muscles, hold your breath, tighten your bottom muscles or squeeze your legs together.

Going to the toilet

After tummy or pelvic surgery, you may have difficulty going to the toilet, feel constipated, or suffer from trapped wind, which can be uncomfortable. The nurses will be able to give you laxatives, to help with this.

Sitting out of bed and walking around will help with being able to go to the toilet.

Make sure your diet includes plenty of fruit and fibre.

Aim to drink between 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid per day.

It is important **not to strain** when opening your bowels, as this will put pressure on the operation site.

To help you to go to the toilet:

1. Put your feet on a small stool, to raise your knees slightly above your hips.
2. Lean forward slightly, with your elbows on your knees.
3. Keep your back straight.
4. Relax and do not strain.



Progressing your activity

How much should I try to do after my operation?

It is important to keep moving, little and often, as you feel able. For example, sitting out of bed, and walking to the toilet, and when you start to feel better, walking around the ward. This will help to improve your breathing, general circulation, and will make you feel better in the longer term.

You are likely to have some discomfort after your surgery. This will depend on the type of surgery you have had. You should tell the nurses if you are in pain, so they can give you the right painkillers. These are important to help you to move about as normally as possible.

It is important not to stay in bed for long periods of time, unless the doctors on the ward tell you to do so.

How much should I do when I go home?

You will go home when you are medically and physically fit. Slowly increase your activity levels over the days and weeks after your surgery as you feel able, for example, walking and doing light

tasks around your home. You may feel tired, so ensure you take regular breaks, and rest if you need to.

Raise your general activity levels when you feel ready, by taking short walks outside, starting with about 5 or 10 minutes. Slowly build this up over the following days and weeks as you feel able. How much you are able to do will depend on your activity levels before, and what you are aiming to get back to.

General information

Lifting guidelines

Avoid lifting anything heavy for a few weeks. How long you need to be careful for will depend on the surgery you have had.

- If you have had stitches in your tummy, or vaginal or pelvic floor repair, avoid heavy lifting for 6 weeks. This is to protect the operation site as it heals.
- If you have had a keyhole (laparoscopic) or robotic procedure, recovery time may be quicker, but please check with the doctor on the ward before leaving hospital.
- When lifting, make sure you keep a good posture. Bend slightly from your hips and knees. Draw in your tummy and pelvic floor muscles as you lift, to support your back and pelvic region.



If this causes you to strain, or any pain - do not lift!

Driving

If you have had tummy surgery, or vaginal / pelvic floor repair, you should not drive for 6 weeks. If you have had keyhole surgery, you may be able to start driving sooner. Make sure you feel well and mentally alert enough to drive and control the car in an emergency situation.

You need to be able to

- do an emergency stop without causing yourself pain,
- wear a seat belt comfortably,
- turn to see over your shoulder.

Please check with your insurance company before driving, to make sure that you are covered after having surgery.

Returning to work or usual activities

- Depending on your work, you may be able to return to a desk job or light duties after about 6 weeks.
- You may need to take up to 12 weeks off if your job is physically demanding, or spending long periods of time on your feet.

Discuss your return to work with your employer. You may be able to arrange a phased return, light duties or other adaptations to your work. A risk assessment of your work practices may be helpful.

• Returning to exercise

After about 6 weeks, if all wounds have healed, and there is no abnormal vaginal discharge or bleeding, you may feel ready to progress your activity levels.

Brisk walking, swimming, cycling, low impact gym activities or yoga / pilates are ideal.

Start gently, see how you feel, then progress slowly as you feel able. Remember not to try to do too much too soon. After 12 weeks, you should be able to return to all of your previous activities.

Sexual intercourse

This will depend on how you feel, and the surgery you have had.

- If you have had vaginal surgery / pelvic floor repair, you should wait for 6 weeks, to make sure the operation site has fully healed.
- If you have had keyhole or robotic surgery, it may be safe to have sex sooner. Please talk to your consultant if you are not sure.

Further information

POGP (Pelvic, Obstetric & Gynaecological Physiotherapy website: "Fit following Surgery: Advice and Exercise Following Major Gynaecological Surgery":

<http://pogp.csp.org.uk/publications/fit-following-surgery-advice-exercise-following-major-gynaecological-surgery>

RCOG (Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists website patient information leaflets:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/>

Contact details

Physiotherapy Department - Leicester General Hospital: 0116 258 4070

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Previous reference:

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