

Your Pregnancy Exercise Class

This leaflet explains more about the pregnancy exercise class run by the Pelvic Health physiotherapy service at St George's Hospital. If you have any further questions please speak to the physiotherapist caring for you.

What is the pregnancy exercise class?

This class is designed for pregnant women with pelvic girdle pain or low back pain, to:

- Increase your core strength and control using a Pilates based approach to exercise
- Improve your upper and lower limb strength
- Promote independence to continue with your home exercise programme
- Improve your ability to carry out your daily activities.

Studies have shown this type of exercise can be effective in reducing pregnancy-related pelvic girdle and low back pain.

Classes last for one hour and run over six weeks. In order to get the most out of the class, you should try to attend as many of the sessions as possible.

Who can attend the class?

You can attend if your physiotherapist has enrolled you into this class to help support you during your pregnancy.

What exercises should I do at home?

You should only do these exercises if you have been taught them by a physiotherapist or have attended the class.

It is important to carry out the exercises from the class at home at least two to three times each week to get the most benefit. You should also continue to do any exercises given to you individually by your physiotherapist.

After you have completed six sessions with the physiotherapist, you should carry on doing the exercises at home at least three times a week for the rest of your pregnancy.

Below are the main strengthening and stretching exercises you will learn in the class.

Pick at least one strengthening and one stretching exercise to practise regularly at home.

It may help to mark the exercises below that you plan to practise at home.

Posture in Pilates

Good posture helps low back and pelvic pain so you should keep good posture while standing, lying on your side or in a crawling position. You should think about your posture all through the class.

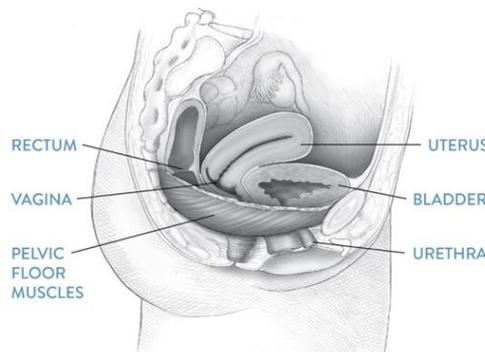
1. When standing, stand with your weight equally between the front and back of your foot.
2. Imagine your pelvis is a bucket of water. Tip your pelvis backwards as if you were spilling water out of the back of the bucket. You will feel your back gently lengthening and your tailbone gliding towards the floor. Now tip your pelvis forward, as if you are spilling water out of the front of the bucket. You will feel your lower back arch slightly. Find your neutral spine position by resting the bucket halfway between these two movements.
3. Lengthen the back of your neck by nodding your chin downwards slightly.
4. Engage your centre by gently pulling in your pelvic floor muscles and transversus abdominis (see below).

Maintain this posture throughout the class and when doing your exercises at home.

Strengthening exercises

1. Pelvic floor muscle exercises

The pelvic floor is a large group of muscles which form a bowl shape from your pubic bone at the front to your tail bone (coccyx) at the back and support your bladder, uterus and bowel.



It is extremely important to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles (PFM) during pregnancy to help prevent problems with incontinence (leakage of urine), prolapse, lower back and pelvic pain, and to increase sensation during sex.

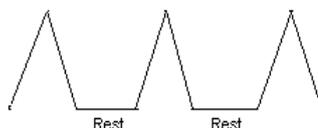
To strengthen your pelvic floor muscles:

- Slowly tighten the muscles around your anus and vagina, lifting up and in as if trying not to pass wind and urine. Do this either sitting or lying on your side.
- Avoid tightening your buttocks, squeezing your legs or holding your breath.
- Do this three times a day in the following two patterns.

A) Hold for 10 seconds, relax for 10 seconds, and repeat 10 times.



B) Imagine the muscles are a lift and lift up as high as you can for about one second, then fully relax. Repeat 15-20 times.



2. Transversus abdominis (TVA)

This muscle is a key stabiliser of your lower back, acting like a corset. It works with your pelvic floor muscles to improve your posture, which can reduce back and pelvic pain.

To strengthen this muscle:

Begin on all fours, keeping your shoulders over your hands and your hips over your knees. Try to keep your back flat.

Breathe in, and then slowly draw in your lower tummy towards your spine as you breathe out. Hold this position while you take three or four breaths, then release.



You should be able to keep breathing normally throughout this exercise. If not, you are bracing too much with your 'six pack' muscles.

3. Superman

Kneel on your hands and knees to begin, your knees directly under your hips and your hands slightly forward of your shoulders. Keep your elbow joints relaxed and your head and neck lifted in line with your spine. Lower your back into a flat position, like a table top.

Inhale to prepare.

Level one: arms

- Exhale and reach your left arm forward, keeping your shoulder blade down
- Inhale and lower the arm
- Repeat alternating arms.

Sets: 3 Repeats: 10

Level two: legs

- Reach your left leg out behind you. If this is too hard, keep your foot on the floor and slide it back behind you
- Inhale and lower the leg

- Repeat alternating legs
Sets: 3 Repeats: 10

Level three: arm and leg

- Exhale and reach your left arm forwards off the mat
- At the same time, slide the opposite foot along the floor away from the body and lift the leg off the mat
- Inhale and lower your arm and leg
- Repeat alternating arms and legs.

Sets: 3 Repeats: 10



Tips:

- Imagine balancing a drinks tray on your lower back to avoid rocking sideways
- Imagine reaching through the arms and legs to reach the wall in front of and behind you.

4. Knee hover

Kneel on your hands and knees to begin, your knees directly under your hips and your hands slightly forward of your shoulders. Curl your toes under and rest on the balls of your feet. Keep your elbow joints relaxed and your head and neck lifted in line with your spine. Lower your back into a flat position, like a table top.

- Inhale to prepare
- Exhale and draw in your pelvic floor and lower your tummy as you hover your knees one inch off the mat, keeping your spine neutral
- Inhale and hold this position for between one and three breaths
- Exhale and lower your knees to the mat.

Sets: 1 Repeats: 10



The following exercises strengthen the gluteal muscles, the muscles around your hips and bottom, which help stabilise your lower back and pelvis during pregnancy. Strengthening these muscles can also help reduce low back and pelvic pain.

1. Clam

Level one

- Lie on your side to begin, with the arm underneath stretched out in line with your trunk and your head resting on your arm
- Bend your hips slightly and your knees to 90° (a right angle)
- Let your top hand rest on the floor
- Draw the top hip downwards away from the top shoulder to create a small space between your waist and the mat
- Engage centre and inhale to prepare
- Exhale and lift the top knee upwards keeping the feet together
- Inhale and lower the top knee onto the bottom leg
- Repeat lying on your other side.

Sets: 3 Repeats: 10 for each leg



Level two

- Lie in the position in the picture to begin and draw in your pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles
- Inhale to prepare
- Exhale and lift the top knee upwards, keeping the feet together and lifted off the mat
- Inhale and lower the top knee onto the bottom leg, keeping the feet lifted off the mat.

Sets: 3 Repeats: 10 for each leg



2. Lift and lower

- Lie on your side with your underneath arm stretched out in line with your trunk to begin
- Rest your head on your arm and slightly bend your hips with your legs stretched out long in line with your trunk
- Keep your shoulders and hips in line and your top hand on your hip or the floor for support
- Draw your top hip downwards away from your top shoulder to create a small space between your waist and the mat.



- Inhale to prepare
- Exhale, reach your top leg away from your body and then lift it upwards in an arc pointing your toes
- Inhale and lower this leg back to the starting position, flexing the ankle.



Sets: 3 Repeats: 10 for each leg

Imagine balancing a cup of tea on your top hip and top shoulder to avoid moving these areas.

3. Side kick

Level one

- Lie on your side with your knees bent and your knees slightly forwards from your hips
- Inhale to prepare
- Exhale and lift your top leg to hip height. Then glide this leg forwards from your hip joint, keeping the knee bent and the leg lifted at hip height
- Inhale and glide this leg back above your underneath leg, keeping the knee bent and the leg lifted at hip height.



Sets: 3 Repeats: 10 for each leg

Level two

- Extend both legs and flex your ankles to begin. You should be able to see your toes if you look towards your feet
- Inhale to prepare
- Exhale and lift the top leg to hip height, then glide this leg forwards from your hip joint, keeping the leg lifted at hip height
- Inhale and glide this leg back above your underneath leg, keeping your leg lifted at hip height
- Repeat, keeping your top leg lifted to hip height.



Sets: 3 Repeats: 10 for each leg

The following exercise strengthens your oblique muscles (your waist muscles) which help stabilise the front of your pelvis.

1. Side bend

- Lie on your side with your hips slightly bent and knees bent to 90°
- Support your upper body with your underneath forearm



- Lift your underneath waist and ribcage away from the mat, with your hips and shoulders in a line facing forwards and your top arm resting long on top of the legs
- Keep your neck long and in line with your trunk.
- Inhale to prepare
- Exhale and gently engage your gluteal muscles to lift your pelvis off the mat, forming a diagonal line from your head to your knees, while reaching your top arm upwards in an arc within your peripheral vision
- Inhale and hold this side bend
- Exhale; lower your pelvis to the mat while lowering your top arm.



Sets: 1 Repeats: 10 on each side

Stretching Exercises

The following stretches stretch your upper and lower back.

1. Cat stretch

- Put yourself into the position in the picture and draw in your pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles
- Inhale to prepare
- Exhale and roll your tailbone and pelvis downwards towards the floor
- Round your lower back and continue to round your middle and upper back and finally your neck to form a C shaped curve from your tailbone to the crown of your head
- Inhale and hold the cat position
- Exhale and roll your tailbone and pelvis back to neutral
- Lengthen your lower, middle and upper back and finally your head and neck to neutral
- Draw your shoulder blades downwards and lengthen the back of your neck.

Sets: 2-3 Repeats: 10



Tips:

- Do not push too hard
- Arms should stay straight and legs still
- Increase the stretch further by widening the space between your knees and sitting back onto your heels (modified child's pose).

2. Arm openings

- Lie on your side with your head supported on a small pillow to begin
- Reach your arms out in front of your body, resting one on top of the other
- Bend your hips to about 45° (half a right angle) and your knees to about 90° (a right angle).
- Reach your top arm towards the ceiling, and then out to the side, allowing the upper body to rotate and the front of the chest to open to the ceiling
- Allow your head to follow the movement of the arm, keeping your top hip still
- Hold this stretch for three breaths
- Rotate your body and arm back to the start position.
Repeat 10 times on each side.



Gluteal stretch – this stretch is for your bottom muscles.

- Kneel on your hands and knees to begin, with your knees wider than your hips
- Cross your left foot over your right leg
- Press your hips towards the left as far as you can
- You should feel a stretch in your left bottom muscle.

Hold for 30 seconds then repeat to the other side.



3. Adductor stretch - this stretch is for your inner thigh muscles.

- Stand with your feet wider than your hips to begin
- Bend your left knee and gently lean over to the left, keeping your right knee straight
- You should feel a stretch on the inside of your right leg.

Hold 30 seconds then repeat to the other side.



4. Hip flexor stretch - this stretch is for the muscles at the front of your hips.

- Stand with your left leg forwards and your right leg back. Lift your back heel up and keep your weight through your front leg
- Gently rotate your pelvis upwards, pressing your tailbone down towards the floor
- Press your hips forwards
- You should feel a stretch at the front of your right hip.

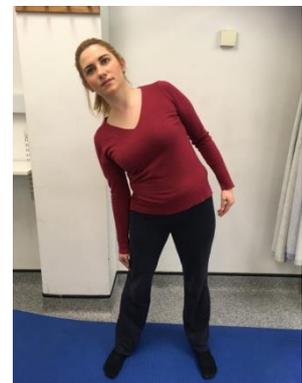
Hold 30 seconds then repeat to the other side.



5. Side stretch - this stretch is for your lower back muscles.

- Stand with your feet wider than your hips to begin
- Lean down towards the left, reaching your left hand towards your left knee
- You should feel a stretch in the right side of your lower back.

Hold 30 seconds the repeat to the other side.



Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about antenatal exercise, please contact Pelvic Health Physiotherapy on 020 8725 1333 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm). Out of hours, please leave an answer phone message on the number above and we will contact you as soon as we can.

The Physiotherapist leading your class is:

If you can't make a class please contact the department on 020 8725 1333 to let us know.

All photographs and exercises used with permission from APPI Health Group using PilatesPro

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: PHY_PEC_02 **Published:** October 2019 **Review date:** October 2021