

Postnatal Exercise Class

This leaflet gives information about the postnatal 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 postnatal exercise class?

The postnatal exercise class is a **virtual** exercise class for women who have musculoskeletal pain, rectus abdominis diastasis (RAD) or pelvic floor muscle dysfunction after having their baby. The class aims to:

- Assist you to have a supervised, controlled return to exercise
- improve your awareness and knowledge of postnatal symptoms and how to manage them
- improve your core strength and control
- improve your mood and energy levels
- improve your confidence to do exercises at home.

Classes last for one hour and you will be booked into six weekly sessions. To get the most out of them, you are expected to attend all six sessions. The class involves a variety of exercises focusing on strengthening exercises and stretches.

- Please wear clothing in which you feel comfortable to exercise.
- Please have water available, an exercise mat if you have one and if you would like to use weights but do not have any, then use tins / bottles as required.

Who can attend the service?

You can attend if your physiotherapist has enrolled you into this class to help you return to exercising after having your baby.

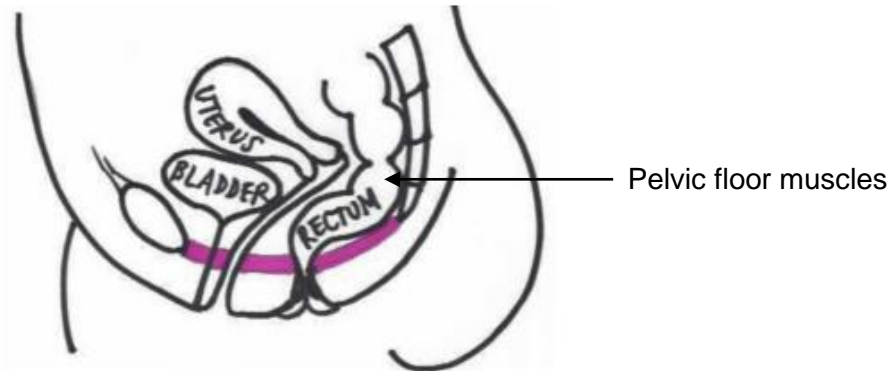
What exercises should I do at home?

A selection of the class exercises is listed overleaf. **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 twice each week to get the most benefit. After completing the class, we encourage continuing with either some of these exercises or engaging in a form of exercise you enjoy. If any of these exercises cause any increase in pain or your continence symptoms do not settle, please consult your physiotherapist so the exercises can be modified for you.

The Pelvic Floor

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



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

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

To exercise your pelvic floor muscles, slowly tighten the muscles around your anus and vagina, lifting up and inwards as if trying not to pass wind and urine. Then fully relax the muscles before repeating. Do this either while lying or sitting and progress to a standing position. Avoid tightening your buttocks, squeezing your legs or holding your breath. Do this three times a day in the following two patterns:

1) Hold for as long as you can up to 10 seconds, then fully relax, repeat up to 10 times or until your muscles feel tired.



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



You can find a video on female pelvic floor muscle exercises from the following QR code:



Class exercises

Warm up

March on spot (elbow to opposite knee)

Neck movements (left to right)

Heel raises

Bottom kicks

Shoulder rolls

Star jump step

Trunk rotation

Spinal roll down

Main Exercises

Repeat 8-15 reps x 3-5 sets of all the strengthening exercises. You can progress by adding a weight.

Squat



Level 1 - body weight

Level 2 - both arms in the air as you squat down

Level 3 - holding a weight

Standing with your feet hip width apart, squat down as if you are sitting onto a chair or as low as you feel comfortable, then slowly stand back up tall again squeezing the bottom muscles as you stand back up. Ensure you remain balanced. If you lose your balance do not squat quite as low.

Lunge



Level 1 - Body weight, arms as pictured

Level 2 - Arms in the air

Level 3 - Weighted

Take a large step forward with one leg.

Allow both legs and hips to bend, so that your knees are at 90 degrees, your back heel comes off the floor and the shin of your front leg is vertical.

Pushing through your feet return up to the starting position and repeat.

Make sure your knees travel directly always forwards over your toes.

Side lying hip abduction



Level 1 - Body weight

Level 2 - Add an ankle weight or TheraBand for resistance

Lie on your side, making sure there is a straight line from your head, through your trunk and down your legs.

Pull the toes up towards you.

Raise the top leg straight up, then slowly bring your leg back down. Try to keep your pelvis still throughout this movement.

Clam shell exercises



Level 1 - Body weight

Level 2 - add an ankle weight or resistance band

Lie on your side with your feet, ankles and knees together.

Bend the legs a little and tighten your core muscles.

Keeping the feet together, lift the top knee.

Make sure you don't roll your body back with the movement.

Control the movement as you bring the knee back down to the starting position.

Bridge



Level 1 - Glute bridge as pictured

Level 2 - Glute bridge with both hands pointing to the ceiling

Level 3 - Glute bridge with alternate leg lifts.

Lie on your back and bend your knees. Activate your pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles by gentle rolling your lower back into the mat.

Lift your bottom and lower back off the mat starting with your bottom until you are resting on your shoulder blades

Inhale and hold the shoulder bridge position.

Exhale, lower your body back onto the mat by beginning with the highest vertebrae of your bridge and finishing with your tailbone, to return to the neutral position.

4-point Transverse abdominal activation with pelvic floor contraction



Start in a kneeling position (as pictured) with your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips.

Your back should be flat.

Contract your pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles, pulling the muscles in towards your spine. You should feel your abdominal wall lift.

Hold this position for as long as you can up to 10 seconds, relax, and then repeat.

Ensure you do not hold your breath during the exercise, continue to breath normally whilst holding the contraction.

Superman



Level 1 - arm lift only

Level 2 - Leg lift only

Level 3 - alternative arm and leg simultaneously as described below

Start on your hands and knees, with your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips.

Tighten the abdominal muscles.

Extend the opposite leg and the opposite arm simultaneously, ensuring you maintain control in your core.

Do not allow your body or hips to rotate.

Repeat on the other side.

Plank



Level One: Knee plank

Lie down on a mat on your front.

Lift your chest and hips up off the floor using your forearms but keeping your knees on the floor.

Keep your shoulders strong and do not sink down at the hips or the chest, your back should remain flat. Hold for as long as you can.

Relax and return to the starting position.



Level Two: Full plank

Lie on your front with your toes on the floor.

Place your forearms on the floor and push up, lifting your trunk and legs. Hold a straight line from your shoulders to your feet for as long as you can, try and stop your back from arching by staying strong in your core.

Table-Tops

Level 1 - Crook lying table-top



Lie on your back and bring your legs up to a table-top position with your hips and knees at a right angle.

Relax your upper body and drop one bent knee to the floor whilst maintaining the table-top position with the other (as pictured).

Bring this leg back up and repeat with the other leg.

Ensure you keep your core strong and back flat on the floor throughout this exercise.



Level 2 - Table top with straight leg drop

Lie on your back and bring your legs up to a table-top position with your hips and knees at a right angle.

Relax your upper body as you extend one leg down to the floor, whilst maintaining the table-top position with the other.

Bring this leg back up and repeat with the other leg.

Ensure you keep your core strong and your back flattened to the floor throughout this exercise.

If you find that your lower back is arching off the floor, go back to the level 1 exercise.

Cool Down Child Pose



Start on your hands and knees and drop your bottom into the back of your heels (as pictured).

Reach your hands forwards, with your head between your shoulders facing the floor

You should feel this stretch through your back and upper arms.

Hold this position for 30 seconds. Complete once or twice per day.

Cat Cow



Start on your hands and knees with your back in a neutral position.

Start by arching your back upwards, tucking your head and tail bone in and pulling your belly button in towards your spine
Hold this position.

Next, arch your back down and lift your head.

Hold this position and then repeat.

Hold each position for five seconds. Complete x 10 repeats once or twice per day.

Glute Stretch



Lie on your back with your knees bent. Cross one leg over your other knee, placing the outside of your ankle just above the knee. Lifting the other foot up off the mat and place your hands around the back of the thigh (as pictured). You should feel a stretch through your buttock.

Hold for 30 seconds. Complete once or twice per day.

Hip Flexor Stretch



Kneel on the floor and place one foot in a large stride in front of you.

Drop your hips forwards and keep your body straight until you feel the stretch in the front of the hip of your back leg.

Hold this position.

Hold for 30 seconds. Complete once or twice per day.

Addendum

We hope these classes will help you feel stronger and more able to carry on exercising at home. Joining a local exercise class will also help you to carry on improving your strength and ability.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns around postpartum exercise please contact Pelvic Health Physiotherapy, on **020 8725 1333** (voicemail only) or email pelvic-health-physiotherapy@stgeorges.nhs.uk. Please leave a telephone message on the number above and we will contact you as soon as we can.

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 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.

