

Pregnancy Exercise Class

This leaflet explains 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 strength and movement 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.

Classes last for up to one hour and run over six weeks. 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 they are taught to you by a physiotherapist or if you 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 and continue throughout your pregnancy. You should also continue to do any exercises given to you individually by your physiotherapist.

Strengthening Exercises

1. Pelvic floor muscle exercises

The pelvic floor is a large group of muscles which forms a bowl shape running from your pubic bone at the front, to your tail bone (coccyx) at the back. They 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.

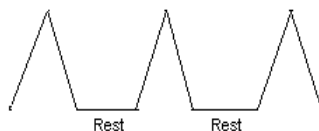
To strengthen your pelvic floor muscles:

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

A) Aim to hold for 10 seconds, relax for 10 seconds and repeat 10 times. You might not be able to achieve this initially, if not, then work until you feel your pelvic floor muscles tire.



B) Imagine the muscles are lifting up as high as you can for about one second, then fully relax. Repeat 15 to 20 times or until your pelvic floor muscles tire.



2. Hug the baby



Starting on all fours. Inhale in to prepare and exhale lift through the pelvic floor and hug baby in towards your spine by contracting your tummy muscles.

Maintain this whilst breathing normally. Aim to hold for 1 to 3 breaths.

Relax your tummy muscles.

Repeat x 10.

3. Knee hover



Starting on all fours. Curl your toes under and rest on the balls of your feet. Keep your elbow joints relaxed.

Inhale to prepare, exhale and draw in your pelvic floor and engage your abdominal muscles 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.

Repeat x 10

4. Superman



Level one: arms only

Starting on all fours. Knees under hips, hands under shoulders.

Inhale to prepare, exhale and draw in your pelvic floor and engage your abdominal muscles, whilst reaching one arm forward. Inhale and lower the arm. Repeat alternating arms.

Repeat x 10

Level two: legs only

Keep your foot on the floor and slide it back behind you, progress to lifting the leg off the floor.

Inhale and return your leg to the starting position. Repeat alternating legs.

Repeat x 10

Level three: arm and leg

Exhale and reach your 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 floor if able.

Inhale and lower your arm and leg to the starting position. Repeat alternating arms and legs.

Repeat x 10

Tips: Imagine balancing a drinks tray along your spine to avoid rocking sideways.

5. Clam



Lying on your side with your hips and knees slightly bent.

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.

Repeat x 10 for each leg

6. Lift and lower

Lie on your side.



Inhale to prepare, exhale to reach your top leg away from your body and lift.

Inhale and lower this leg back to the starting position.

Keep the bottom leg bent for stability if needed.

Repeats x 10 for each leg

Stretching Exercises

1. Cat stretch



Inhale to prepare, exhale, curve your back up to the ceiling tucking your tail between your legs.

Inhale and reverse by tipping your tail up to the ceiling letting your back arch down to the floor.

Repeat x 5-10

2. Thread the needle



Starting on your hands and knees reach one arm underneath and through the other, aiming your ear towards the floor, keep your hip bones pointing down. Hold for 1 to 3 breaths. Then slowly draw your hand away reaching up towards the ceiling, rotating in the opposite direction.

Repeat on the other side.

Make this exercise comfortable for you by adjusting how big or small you make the movement.

Repeat x 5 on each side.

3. Gluteal stretch – this stretch is for your bottom muscles.



Sitting comfortably in a chair, cross one leg over the other in a figure 4 position. Lean forward until you feel a stretch around the outside of your hip.
Hold for 30 seconds then repeat on the other side.

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



In standing step one leg out to the side, shift your weight to this side by bending the knee. Keep the opposite leg straight, keep going until you feel a stretch in the inner thigh of the straight leg.
This can also be performed sitting on the edge of a chair.
Hold for 30 seconds then repeat on the other side.

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



In a half kneeling position, tuck your tail bone under and gently shift your pelvis forwards until you feel a stretch in the front of your hip.

Try to keep your hips facing forwards and lower back flat.

Hold 30 seconds then repeat on the other side.

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



Stand with your feet wider than your hips to begin

Lower your left hand down towards your left knee, reaching up and over your head with your right arm.

You should feel a stretch in the right side of your lower back.

Hold for 3 to 4 breaths and repeat on the other side complete x 5 on each side.

Useful sources of information

Please follow QR codes below for videos on:
Female pelvic floor muscle exercises



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) or email pelvic-health-physiotherapy@stgeorges.nhs.uk

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.

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 advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

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

NHS UK

The NHS 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.



Reference: MAT_PEC_02 **Published:** March 2025 **Review date:** March 2027