

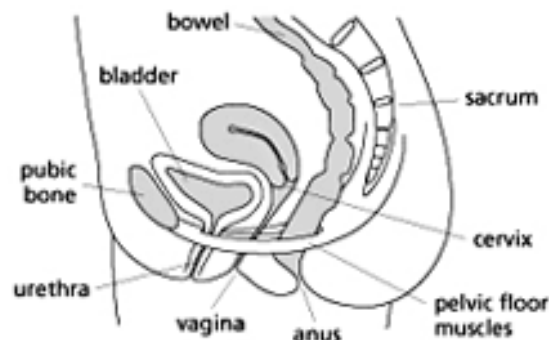
Early postnatal care of your perineum

- **Hygiene** – Change sanitary pads regularly. Shower the perineal area regularly and gently pat dry with a soft towel.
- **Protect** – Avoid high impact (running/jumping) exercise for at least 12 weeks. Be aware repetitive lifting can cause increased strain on the pelvic floor. Minimise lifting anything heavier than your baby for at least six weeks. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles prior to coughing, sneezing and lifting.
- **Rest** – It is important to have regular rest, especially during the first three days following birth. This will minimise swelling and discomfort. Try to rest for an hour each morning and afternoon during the first six weeks after the birth of your baby. Lying on your tummy with a pillow under your hips is an excellent resting position and provides elevation to the perineum to assist reduction of swelling.
- **Ice** – Ice packs can be used to relieve swelling or pain around the perineum in the first 3 days after birth. Place the ice pack inside a damp cloth and apply for 20 minutes every 2-3 hours that you are awake.
- **Compression** – Use two sanitary pads, one on top of the other and wear firm supportive underwear that lifts up under your perineum to provide support and minimise swelling. Sitting is a form of compression however may be uncomfortable for stitches. This discomfort may be relieved by placing two folded towels side by side on your chair, leaving a small gap between them and positioning yourself so that one buttock and thigh is supported by each towel.
- **Exercise** – It is helpful to reconnect with your pelvic floor muscles soon after birth of your baby to optimise natural healing, provide support and establish a good routine. See below and page 4 for more details.



Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

The pelvic floor muscles are a small but important group of muscles. They lie inside the pelvis and act to support the pelvic organs and control emptying of the bladder and bowel. During pregnancy some changes will have occurred with additional stretching and in some cases tearing during the birth. In the early weeks post birth there will be natural recovery and healing and **strenuous** pelvic floor exercises are **not required** in the first 8 weeks after birth. **Protective bracing** of these muscles **prior to coughing, sneezing or lifting** and some **gentle movements to reconnect with these muscles** are however of benefit and recommended (see page 4 for guidance).



Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercise Program

Emphasis is on protection and support: brace your pelvic floor muscles before activities such as coughing, sneezing or lifting.

Gentle program – days 2 to 5

1. Lie down on your back with your knees bent up and supported or lie on your side.
2. Gently squeeze and lift up the muscles around your vagina and back passage
3. Hold the squeeze for only one second and then fully release
4. Emphasis is on feeling some gentle movement of the muscle- a squeeze and lift and then full relaxation
5. Rest for 3 seconds and then repeat.
6. Try to do 6 repetitions, less if you feel muscle fatigue
7. Repeat this set of 6 repetitions on one other occasion per day
8. Also tighten your pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing or lifting.



Build repetitions and try different positions- days 5 to 14

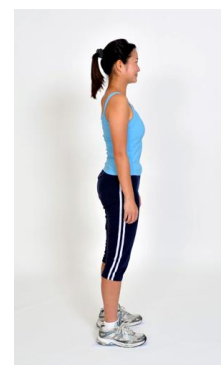
As well as lying in the positions above you can also exercise while sitting or on your hands and knees.

1. Continue the gentle squeeze and lifts as above
2. Hold for only one second then fully release
3. You should feel a definite release; rest for 2 seconds, do 6- 8 reps
4. Do a total of 2 sets per day
5. Remember to tighten your pelvic floor before coughing, sneezing or lifting.



Recovery program – weeks 3 to 8

Progress your exercise program by increasing hold time to 2 seconds. Continue to ensure you are lifting as well as squeezing and fully relaxing the muscles after each repetition. Rest 2 seconds between reps. Increase the reps to 8-10. Do 2 sets per day in different positions, such as sitting and standing. Add a 3rd set per day after 6 weeks. Remember to tighten your pelvic floor before coughing, sneezing or lifting.



Strengthening program – after 8 weeks

Squeeze and lift the muscles more firmly. Add an additional second of hold time per week, gradually building to 10 seconds hold/ 10 seconds rest. Ensure you are not holding your breath. Do 3 sets of 10 reps per day.

If you are experiencing and bladder or bowel control issues at this time notify your GP and seek an assessment with a Women's Health Physiotherapist for individual assessment and pelvic floor muscle exercise prescription. This is also recommended prior to returning to high impact or strenuous exercise.

Maintenance program –after 16 weeks:

An individualised assessment and exercise prescription is ideal, however at minimum a maintenance program of 3 sets of 10 reps with 10 second holds, 2-3 days each week is recommended.