

Postnatal Bladder, Bowel and Pelvic Floor Care

What is the Risk?

During pregnancy there is stretching of the muscles and connective tissue (fascia) that make up the pelvic floor and also pressure on the nerves that supply it. Further stretching and in some cases tearing of the muscles and fascia can occur during a vaginal birth leading to an increased risk of bladder and bowel control issues and pelvic organ prolapse. This is more likely to be the case with a prolonged pushing time, if your baby was > 4kg in weight, if your baby was in the 'posterior' position and/or if there was some difficulty delivering your baby's shoulders (shoulder dystocia).

Remember though the body is an amazing natural healer and the following tips can assist to optimise your recovery.

How can I help myself in the early postnatal period?

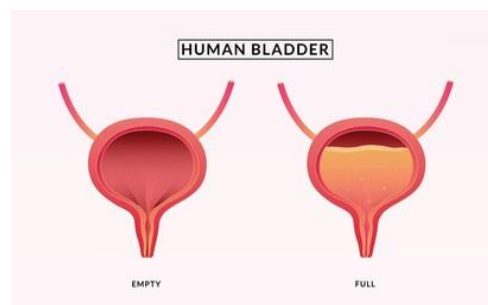
- Take regular pain relief (speak to your midwife or doctor)
- Good bladder care (see below)
- Avoid constipation (aim for a soft, easily passed stool) and avoid straining (see page 2)
- Good perineal care (see page 3)
- Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles prior to coughing, sneezing or lifting to protect against increases in pressure

Bladder Care:

With normal sensation you should feel the need to pass urine when your bladder has reached a volume of between 300 and 500mls. Your bladder sensation may initially be reduced however and if not emptied regularly, overstretching could occur. If your bladder sensation is reduced, emptying your bladder at least every 3 hours during the day and once overnight is recommended until it has returned to normal. This usually only takes a few days however can be much longer.

When emptying your bladder sit in a comfortable position on the toilet and focus on relaxing your pelvic floor and tummy muscles. Take your time to fully empty your bladder.

Please report any unusual bladder (e.g. urgency, incontinence, inability to empty) symptoms to your midwife.



Normal Bladder
Volume
300-500mls

Bowel Care:

It is important to avoid constipation and straining when on the toilet as this can impact on your pelvic floor muscle recovery. Good bowel habits help you to protect your pelvic floor and minimise the risk of both bladder and bowel incontinence.

Prevent constipation by:

- Eating plenty of high fibre foods (e.g. fruits, vegetables, whole grains and prunes)
- Drinking 2-3 litres of fluid per day (water is preferable to tea and coffee)
- Completing some gentle daily exercise such as walking



High Fibre Diet



2-3 Litres per day



Daily walk

How to help the bowel empty

- Respond to the first urge to open your bowel
- Take your time on the toilet so you completely empty your bowel

To avoid straining when opening your bowels try the following:

- Sit leaning forward with your back in a comfortable position with your feet apart and your elbows on your knees
- Use a foot stool so that your knees are above your hips
- Don't hold your breath
- Allow your tummy to relax
- Mouthing the sounds 'ooh' or 'aah' may assist with initiating correct abdominal muscle action
- Support your stitches with your hand and a pad of toilet paper

