

Taking Care of Your Body



Information for the Postpartum Woman

After having a baby it is important to take care of your body and give it time to heal. This pamphlet will help you take the proper steps to get back to your pre-pregnancy level of health and fitness.

Working with your physician, primary care provider, and possibly your physiotherapist can help guide you through this important stage in your life.

What is normal after a vaginal birth:

- Your vaginal area may feel like it is loose or uncomfortable.
- You might have discomfort or pain in your lower back, hips and/or pubic area.
- Sore neck, shoulders and arms from holding baby during feedings and lifting your baby and car seat.
- Light vaginal bleeding and discharge may last for 2 to 4 weeks and can come and go for about 2 months.
- Give your body a chance to heal. Check with your physician at your 6 week appointment before you begin heavier activities and strenuous exercise or workouts.

What is normal after a C-section:

- If you need to cough or sneeze, support your incision with your hands, a towel, or a pillow. You can't do your stitches any harm.
- Avoid strenuous activities, such as jogging, intense cardio or weight lifting for 6 weeks or until your physician says it is okay to resume them.
- Do not lift anything heavier than your baby.

What is not normal after any type of delivery:

At any point you should contact your physician if you have the following symptoms:

- Leaking of urine, gas, or stool with laughter, coughing, jumping, sneezing, lifting, or walking.
- Vaginal bleeding changes to bright red or you are soaking more than 2 pads per hour.
- Difficulty performing everyday activities because of pain, discomfort, leakage, or other concerns.
- Passing clots or bleeding that does not stop after 2-4 weeks.
- A fever over 38°C.
- Red streaks or painful red lumps in your breast.
- Drainage, redness, or open areas in C-section incision.
- Pain or redness in your calf.
- Symptoms of a urinary tract infection such as frequent peeing, burning, foul smell, or fever.

8 weeks after any type of delivery:

- You should be free from pain.
- You should have control of your bladder and bowels.
- If your physician has cleared you, you can resume exercise classes or sports that you were involved in before your baby was born.

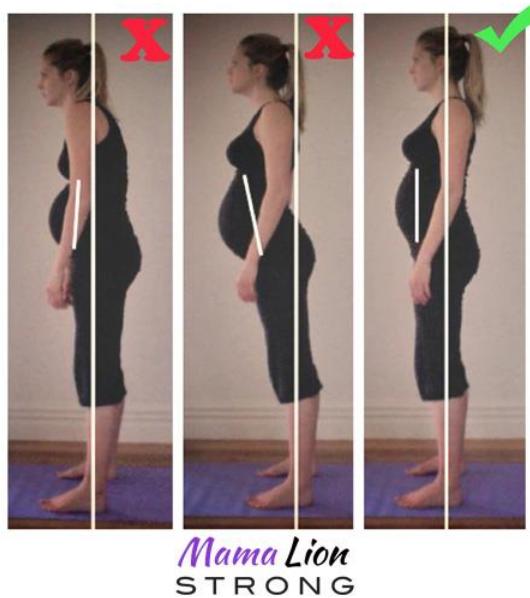
Scar massage:

If you have a scar from a C-section or from a tear (or an episiotomy), you may massage it once it has healed.

With clean hands, gently apply pressure in circular, side-to-side, and up and down motions. As it becomes less painful, you can apply more pressure. Do this until you can move your scar pain-free in all directions.

It is normal to worry about having intercourse after a tear/episiotomy. Massaging your scar will decrease pain and increase your confidence in having pain-free intercourse.

Posture:



Exercises for the first 8 weeks

Begin these within 24 hours of the birth in order to achieve the best results.

1. Ankle pumps (point and flex):

Why? Moving your feet and ankles helps to reduce swelling and improve circulation.

How to do it:

1. Lie comfortably with your legs straight out in front of you.
2. Pull your feet up towards you. Then point them away.
3. Repeat this 10 times.

Do these until you begin your regular daily activities.



2. Deep breathing:

Why? Breathing deeply improves rib and lung expansion and increases circulation.

How to do it:

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
2. Put your hands on your lower rib cage.
3. Take a full breath in through your nose, pushing your lower ribs out to the side without bulging the belly.
4. Blow out of your mouth as if through a straw.
5. Repeat 5-10 times.

3. Pelvic floor muscle exercises (Kegels):

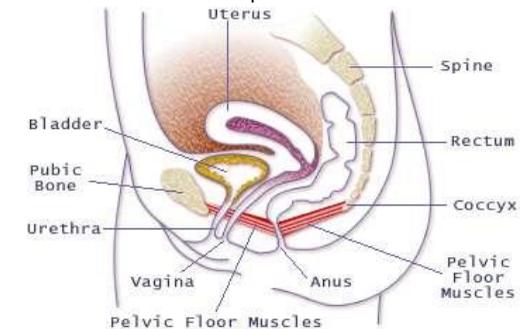
Why? Exercising your pelvic floor muscles will help reduce the risk of future problems with urinary leakage (incontinence) and prolapse (dropping of the bladder, uterus or bowel).

Frequent, gentle tightening of these muscles will also help the healing process.

How to do it:

1. Choose a comfortable position, like lying on the bed or in the bathtub.
2. Tighten the muscles around the vagina (pelvic floor muscles), as if you are trying to stop peeing. Relax fully.
3. Don't worry if you don't feel much to start with – this is normal. As you practice, these muscles will get stronger.
4. Make sure that you don't hold your breath, or tighten your buttocks or legs.
5. Repeat 5-10 times, 2-3 times per day.

If you have a hard time remembering to do this exercise, find a memory trigger such as when you are feeding your baby, or after going to the bathroom.



4. Pelvic tilts:

Why? Pelvic tilts will help improve posture, relieve back ache, and help you to regain pelvic movement.

How:

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed.
2. Tilt your pelvis up so that only your upper back gently touches the bed. Release.
3. Repeat 5-10 times.

Once this exercise feels easy, you can do it in sitting or standing.



5. Deep Abdominal Exercise:

Why? The transverse abdominal muscle acts like a corset to stabilize your spine and pelvis. It will help flatten your stomach and draw in your waistline.

How:

1. Choose a comfortable position (e.g. lying on your side, on your back, or on your stomach.)
2. Do not move your back or let your tummy sag. Breathe in.
3. As you breathe out, gently draw in your navel back to your spine. Let go.
4. Repeat 5-10 times.

Exercises for 8 weeks and beyond

1. Pelvic floor muscle exercises:

Continue as before, increasing the repetitions and length of the holds. Challenge yourself to do the exercises while sitting, standing and even walking!

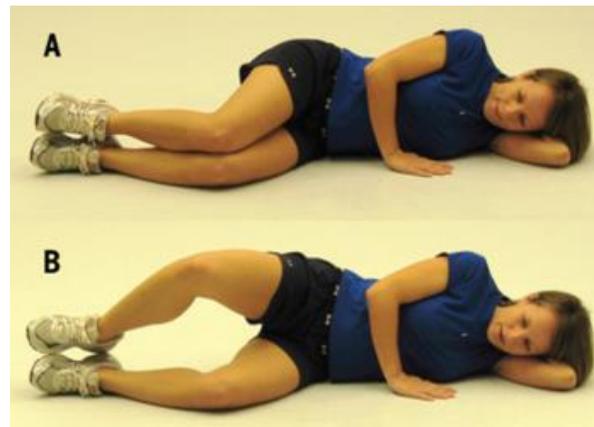
2. Deep abdominal exercises:

1. Position yourself on your hands and knees. Your hands should be under your shoulders and knees are under your hips. Keep your lower low back in a neutral position.
2. Breathe in. While breathing out, gently bring your navel up toward your spine.
3. Repeat 5-10 times.



3. Clamshells:

1. Lie on your side with your hips and knees bent. Line up buttocks, heels, and back of head. Keep hips stacked. Place top hand on floor in front of you.
2. Blow out and lift your top knee, keeping your ankles together, to form a diamond shape with your legs.
3. Do not lean back or rotate your pelvis.
4. Repeat 5-10 times and then repeat on the opposite leg.



4. Bridge:

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
2. Pelvic tilt (as described earlier), then lift hips off the bed. Hold 2-3 seconds then lower.
3. Repeat 5-10 times.



Community Resources

Population and Public Health

http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/ps_public_health.htm

Pelvic Floor Rehabilitation Program

Saskatoon City Hospital

Phone: (306) 655-8208

Fax: (306) 655-8236

In Motion

<http://www.saskatchewaninmotion.ca/>

Saskatoon Health Region

http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/ps_primary_health_healthy_mother_healthy_baby.htm

City of Saskatoon Leisure Guide

<http://www.saskatoon.ca/DEPARTMENTS/COMMUNITY%20SERVICES/LEISURESERVICES/Pages/LeisureGuide.aspx>

City of Saskatoon Community Centres

<http://www.saskatoon.ca/DEPARTMENTS/Community%20Services/LeisureServices/LeisureCentres/Pages/default.aspx>