



Basic Exercise Guidelines For After You Have Had Your Baby



This handout contains information and exercise guidelines for the early postpartum period. It is safe for both cesarean and vaginal births.

When Can I Start Exercising?

Listen to your body. It takes time to heal. Start moving right away but increase your activity gradually. Balance rest with activity. It is normal to feel some heaviness and/or discomfort through your bottom in the first few weeks but this should improve. Usually your vaginal flow (bleeding) stops by 6 weeks. Until this time don't do any heavy lifting or hard activity.

What Can I Do Right Away?

- Attend the BC Women's **Postpartum Physiotherapy Class** (refer to back page)
- Focus on **good posture**. Sit and walk tall. This will help you feel better. Use pillows to support your back and your baby when sitting or feeding.
- **Stretch** the muscles of your back, shoulders and neck after feeding or carrying your baby.
- **Pelvic floor muscle and deep tummy muscle exercises** (see below).

1. Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises (Kegels)

- Improve bowel and bladder control
- Improve support for your pelvic organs
- Help your overall "core" muscle strength

Speed'ems: Pull your pelvic floor muscles up and in quickly and strongly as if to stop urine or gas from leaking. Hold only for 1 or 2 counts. Relax completely. Do several in a row until your muscles begin to feel tired. When this becomes easy, do more (up to 30 in a row). This exercise is important to help stop leakage when you cough, sneeze, lift or laugh.

Hold'ems: Pull your pelvic floor muscles up and in quickly and strongly as you did with Speed'ems but hold for a slow count of 5. Pull up more and more. Make sure you continue to breathe. Relax completely. Rest 10 seconds before trying your next one. Repeat 5-10 times. When this becomes easy, hold longer (up to 10 seconds and repeat 10 times).

Remember to:

- Do pelvic floor muscle exercises (kegels) 3 times a day for the first few weeks
- Doing a few exercises correctly is better than many poorly
- Do a kegel whenever you cough, sneeze, lift or laugh
- Continue to do kegels daily as a life long commitment

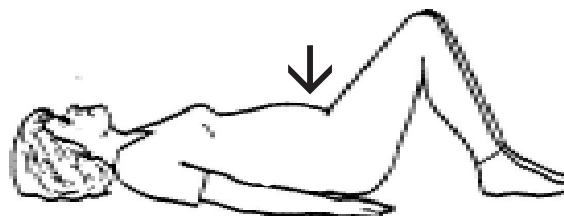
2. Abdominal (tummy) Muscle Exercises

- A strong back needs strong abdominal muscles
- Remember to breathe during the exercise (avoid holding your breath)
- Start with 5 repetitions, 2 times per day. As you feel stronger, do more

Tummy Tucks:

Breathe in normally and as you breathe out, tighten your tummy while doing a kegel. Pause and then let go. Repeat 5 times.

As you increase your activity level and return to your regular exercise routine you need to be careful that you are doing things correctly.



Remember:

- Stand and walk tall. Avoid slouching or bending over too much.
- When you lift, bend from your knees and hips not with your back. Remember to tighten your inner core muscles (do a kegel and tummy tuck) and breathe out as you lift.
- Make time to rest everyday. You will recover better from your pregnancy and the birth of your baby if you are well rested.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles while you do the tummy muscle exercises.
- Do not do the next exercise if your tummy is bulging or gapping as you exercise or you feel pressure in your vagina or rectum.
- These simple exercises will get you started as you tone and firm the muscles stretched during pregnancy.

What is normal after 6-8 weeks:

- Your bleeding should have stopped and your incisions/tears should have healed.
- You should have control over your bowel and bladder.
- Start exercising slowly. Stop if you have pain, leak urine or stool, or if your bleeding resumes.
- See your medical professional if you have concerns.

Exercise Guidelines:

- Make time each day for some exercise (for example, 30 minutes of walking)
- Exercise is good for your body and will make you feel stronger and have more energy
- Start slowly and listen to your body
- Go at your own pace. Everyone recovers after having a baby at a different rate.
- You may want to join a postpartum exercise class. Check for locations with your local Health Unit or Community Centre.



Consult your physiotherapist if you have:

- ongoing back, pelvis, groin or abdominal pain
- leaking urine, gas or stool when you laugh, sneeze, cough, lift, exercise or any other time
- a wide gap or bulging of your abdominal muscles during any exercise
- pressure or bulging in your vagina or rectum

Postpartum Physiotherapy Class

10:00 - 11:00 am

Monday, Wednesday or Friday

Room 2N41B (opposite Balsam Square)

This is a “one time” attendance class with focus on education, body mechanics and information regarding early postpartum activity.

This is **not** an exercise class.

Plan to attend anytime within the first 6 weeks after delivery of your baby.

Your newborn is welcome.

Phone **604-875-2126** to register if attending after going home.

BCW Physiotherapy Department will see patients up to 6 weeks after delivery for consultation/treatment as necessary but attendance at the Postpartum Physiotherapy Class is required first.

To find a physiotherapist near you:

www.bcphysio.org and click on **Find a Physio.**