Patient Information

Physiotherapy after a caesarian section

az turnhout

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Introduction

Congratulations on the birth of your son or daughter!
During the weeks after childbirth, your body needs time to return to how it was before the pregnancy. In this brochure we want to provide you with some exercises and tips that will help you in doing so.

If you have any questions after reading the brochure, feel free to ask. Your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist will be happy to give you more information.

Getting in and out of bed

The day after your caesarean, you will be asked to get out of bed a few times over the course of the day. It is important that when doing so, you don't pull too hard on your abdominal muscles.
A good way to sit up from a lying down position: make sure the head of the bed is flat. Bend both knees and turn onto your right side, for instance. Put your right hand under your right thigh. Move your legs alongside the bed while at the same time with your right elbow push yourself up. With your left hand, help push on the bed. In the hospital, you can first completely raise the head of the bed before turning on your side.

Circulatory exercises

Since in the first days you will not be very active, it is important to stimulate your circulation.

It's a good idea to do the following exercises several times a day.

- While lying on your back, raise your feet up and down and move them in circles.
- While lying on your back, pull up your knees one at a time.
- Move your arms.

If you suffer from oedema (swelling) in your feet, raise up the bottom of your bed. Try to walk around regularly. You can support your belly with your hands when you do so.

Breathing exercises

Make sure you don't take too short and superficial breaths. Try every hour to take three very deep breaths after each other and exhale slowly. If you have to cough, don't suppress it but go ahead and cough. Put a bit of pressure on the wound with your hands or a pillow, this will relieve the pain during coughing. Similarly, put pressure on the wound when sneezing, blowing your nose and laughing.

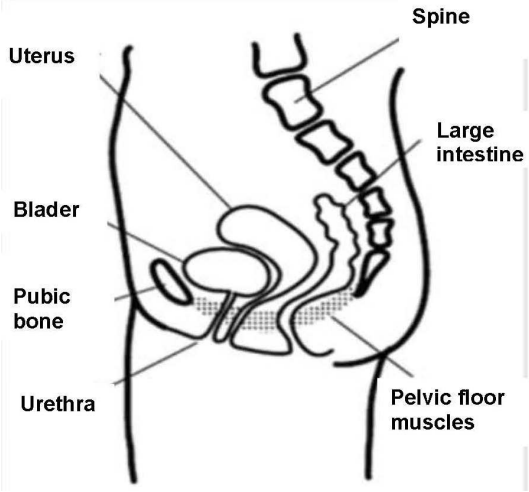
Pelvic floor muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are the muscles that span the bottom of the pelvis. They are a sort of 'hammock' slung between the pubic bone and the tailbone.

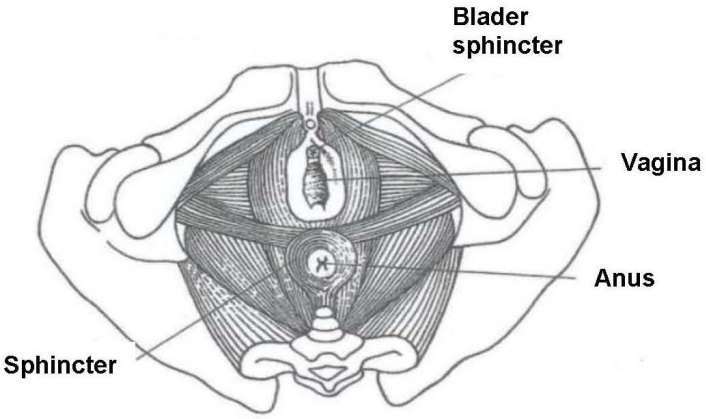
The pelvic floor has 4 important functions:

- closing function to control the bowels and urine
- support function (to support the bladder, uterus and bowels)
- sexual function
- relaxation function (being able to relax fully is important for urination and bowel movements)

Most women with incontinence lose urine when blood pressure rises: when coughing, sneezing of lifting something.



Side view



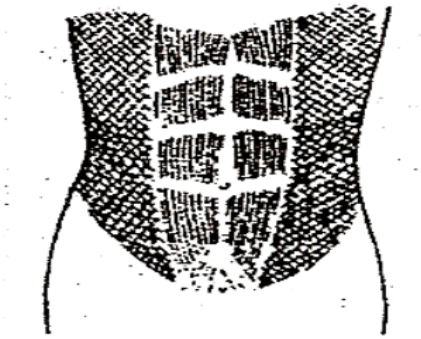
Front view

Pregnancy and giving birth usually lead to a weakening of the pelvic floor. During pregnancy, your pelvic floor is subject to greater strain as the baby grows. Afterwards, hormonal changes cause a slackening of the muscles.

A weakened pelvic floor can lead to involuntary urine loss (incontinence) and subsidence. These complaints can occur immediately after the birth, or they may appear many years later.
We often see the same problem occur again in menopause because the hormonal changes provoke weakening of the pelvic floor muscles.

Abdominal muscles

The abdominal muscles, together with the pelvic floor and back muscles form an extensible corset for our torso. They consist of various layers: transverse, straight and diagonal abdominal muscles. The abdominal muscles help with breathing and ensure stability and movement of the torso. During pregnancy, the stomach stretches enormously. After birth, the belly suddenly goes slack, and the muscles temporarily lose their tone.



Pelvic floor muscle exercises

In order to regain strength in the weakened pelvic floor and to prevent difficulties, we suggest that you begin doing exercises for the pelvic floor muscles as soon as possible.

Begin with 3 contractions in a row. Then build up slowly.

Try to do the exercises during daily activities like watching tv, ironing, walking, sitting in the car, preparing food, waiting somewhere,... In this way, you exercise without wasting too much time.

Try to do around 60 contractions per day at home (a series of 10 repetitions 6x/day). After a while it will become a habit.

Exercise 1: STRENGTH – squeeze and relax
Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles, squeeze around the urethra as if you are holding your urine. Hold shortly and tightly and then release COMPLETELY.

Exercise 2: ENDURANCE – squeeze and relax
Squeeze your pelvic floor, squeeze around the urethra as if you are holding your urine. Do this slowly and hold for 2 to 10 seconds. Then release COMPLETELY.

Exercise 3: CONTROLE – the lift
Squeeze your pelvic floor in 2 or 3 moves. The more the 'lift' goes up, the more you tighten your pelvic floor muscles. Release in 2 or 3 moves as well.

TIP
Try to squeeze and release your pelvic pelvic floor also when you cough, sneeze, lift weight, …

Pelvic floor muscle exercises in combination with abdominal muscles exercises

Immediately after giving birth, the pelvic floor muscles are the most important to be strengthened, but you can always combine pelvic floor exercises with some easy abdominal muscles exercises.

You can perform the following exercises in different positions; lying down, sitting, standing up, …

Exercise 1
Squeeze your pelvic floor and draw in your belly button. Maintain this tension for 3 seconds. If this goes well, gradually increase the time.

Exercise 2: with breathing
Breath in slowly. While breathing out, tighten your pelvic floor and draw in your belly button. Maintain this tension for 3 seconds.
If this goes well, gradually increase the time. Keep on breathing without releasing the tension.

Exercise 3
Breath in slowly. While breathing out, tighten your pelvic floor and draw in your belly button. Then lift your left foot from the bed or floor, maintaining the tension in your pelvic floor and belly. Repeat the process lifting the other foot.

You can make the exercise more difficult by lifting your foot higher or by approaching your knee more to your belly.

Tips

- Try to do these exercises at home every day.
- Begin with the basic exercises.
- Only do these combined exercises when you feel your pelvic floor is strong enough. When your pelvic floor slackens at the end of an exercise, that means that it is too early and you shouldn't continue the combined exercises.

The exercises above can be performed during the first six weeks. If you experience pelvic floor problems or if you want to make the exercises more difficult, you can always turn to a physiotherapist.

Our advice when you resume sports

- Week 0 – 6 walking, exercising on cross trainer or exercise bike, quiet cycling
- Week 6 – 8 Swimming, cycle racing
- Week 8 – 10 Spinning
- From week 13 running, volleyball, football, basketball

Back home

Once you are home, you will not immediately feel back to your old self. Tiredness and pain from the wound play a large role in this. Listen to your body and when you feel tired, get plenty of rest.

A few tips

- In the first 6 weeks, avoid heavy housework (mopping, washing windows, etc.), and don't lift anything heavy (maximum 5-6 kg)
- Walking, going up and down stairs, driving is fine! But build up your activities gradually, as you feel able to.
- If the wound is red, swollen or painful, this could be a sign that you have done too much work. If the symptoms continue, this can be a sign of infection. Have it checked by your family doctor or gynaecologist.

If you have any further questions or comments after reading this brochure, please contact the physiotherapy service.

Who to contact if you have questions or problems?

AZ Turnhout rehabilitation centre
Campus Sint-Jozef
Steenweg op Merksplas 44
2300 Turnhout

Secretariat rehabilitation centre
☏ 014 44 44 80

Personal notes/ questions

If you have questions or comments, use this space to note them. This way you will have them to hand when speaking with your doctor or nurse or physiotherapist.

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AZ Turnhout has drafted this information leaflet with the utmost care. However, the content is general and indicative. The leaflet does not contain all medical aspects. It does not replace the consultation with your healthcare provider. AZ Turnhout, its staff, nor its doctors are responsible for any errors, shortcomings or incompleteness of this leaflet.

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