Patient Information

Physiotherapy after childbirth

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.

Information about rehabilitation

Physiotherapy after childbirth consists of exercises for the pelvic floor muscles.

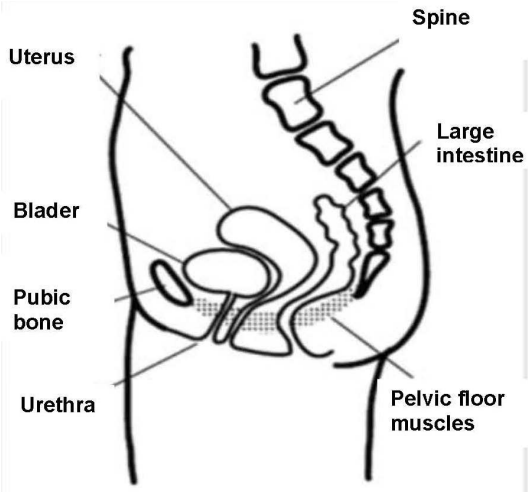
Pelvic floor muscles

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 coccyx.

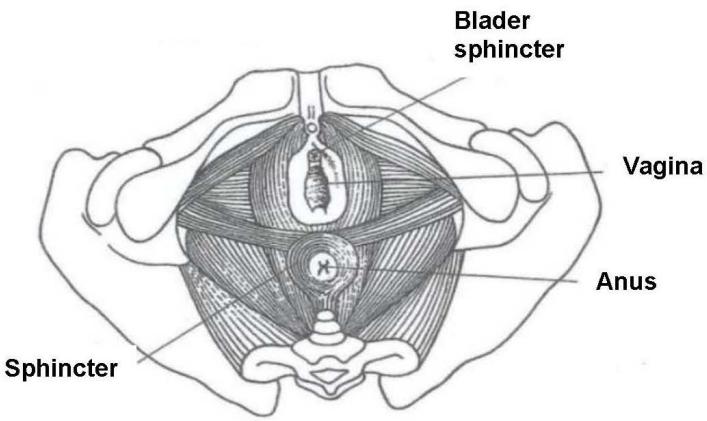
The pelvic floor has 4 important functions:

- 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 the bladder is under pressure: when coughing, sneezing, lifting something, running, jumping, ...



Side view



Front view

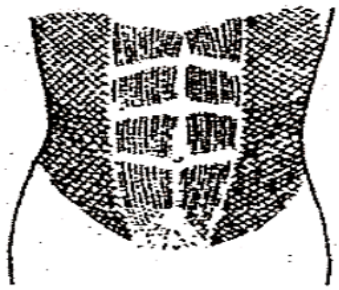
Pregnancy and giving birth usually lead to a weakening of the pelvic floor. During pregnancy, your pelvic floor is subject to greater strain as the baby grows. Afterwards, hormonal changes cause a slackening of the muscles.

During the birth, the baby has to pass through the pelvic floor. This stretches those muscles considerably. Long-standing pressure can also lead to ‘temporary’ damage to the nerves. As a result, after the birth you may have reduced sensation in the pelvic floor. If you have stitches, this can cause discomfort a few days as well.

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.

Exercise 1: STRENGTH – squeeze and relax
Pull up 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
Pull up 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
Pull up your pelvic floor in 2 or 3 moves. The more the 'lift' goes up, the more you lighten your pelvic floor muscles. Release in 2 or 3 moves as well.

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

Pelvic floor exercises in combination with abdominal muscle 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 en 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.

Try to do these exercise 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

Conclusion

If you have any further questions or comments after reading this brochure, please contact the physiotherapy service. We hope that this brochure has helped make the rehabilitation process clearer.

Who to contact if you have questions or problems?

AZ Turnhout Rehabilitation Centre
Sint-Jozef Campus
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.

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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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