

## Bladder and Bowel

Following labour, you may find that simple things like holding in wind, getting to the toilet in time, and opening your bowels are more difficult.

It is important to:

- Make sure you are not constipated by staying well hydrated (2L a day), eating plenty of fibre, fruit and vegetables and regular meals rather than snacking
- Regular pelvic floor exercises will in time reduce these symptoms
- Sitting correctly on the toilet

## What is normal?

- Scar tightness/tenderness, a feeling of vaginal laxity or gapping, an ache/heaviness/pressure especially towards the end of the day, discomfort during intercourse
- These symptoms should resolve with time and rehabilitation
- It generally takes 10-12 weeks (3 months) for your muscles to strengthen, including your pelvic floor, so persevere as they can alleviate the above symptoms
- It can take from 4 months to a year for your body to start feeling “normal”

## Remember:

- Do not practice your pelvic floor exercises by doing a mid stream stop
- Progress your exercises to sitting, then standing and finally during everyday activities
- Pelvic floor exercises are for life!



## What should I do if I have any concerns?

If your symptoms do not improve with intense pelvic floor rehab/ Pilates, then you can self-refer into our service within 16 weeks of delivery.

If you experience any future bladder or bowel leakage, ask your GP or health visitor to refer you to Women’s Health Physiotherapy.

# POSTNATAL PELVIC FLOOR

WOMAN’S HEALTH PHYSIOTHERAPY  
ADVICE LEAFLET



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## What is your Pelvic Floor?

The pelvic floor is made up of muscles and ligaments which lie across the base of your pelvis to support the pelvic organs.

It is important for normal bladder, bowel and sexual function; and supporting your lower back and pelvis.

More information can be found at:

<http://pogp.csp.org.uk/publications/pelvic-floor-muscle-exercises-women>

## Pelvic Floor Exercises

How to do your pelvic floor exercises:

**Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and having a wee.** You are aiming to feel the muscles underneath you lifting upwards and forwards in a “zipping up” motion.

**Your exercise programme** should consist of slow and fast exercises:



### 10 x holds

3-5 seconds initially

Aim for 10-15 seconds eventually



### 10 x quick ones

(contract then relax in quick succession)

It is important to make sure you are fully relaxing the muscle between exercises.

## The ‘Knack’

The knack is a trick we use to replace the pelvic floor reflex lost during childbirth.

Tense your pelvic floor muscle whenever you are about to do anything that might increase the pressure in your abdomen. Such as coughing, sneezing and lifting.

The squeeze app can help to remind you to do this **4 times a day.**

[SQUEEZY APP.CO.UK](http://SQUEEZY.APP.CO.UK) @£2.99

## Scar Massage

**Perineum** - Once the wound has healed, firm but comfortable massage across the scar using lubricant such as non-scented oil can help to desensitise the scar tissue.

## Returning to intercourse

If you are breast feeding then your oestrogen levels are lower which may cause vaginal dryness.

You may need extra lubrication; oil based will last longer than water based lubricants.

Initially try different positions to try and take the pressure off any scar tissue and cervix.

There is no specific time to return to sex but many women say from about 8 weeks it is comfortable. You should only return to intercourse when you are feeling ready.

## DRAM

(Diastasis Rectus Abdominis Muscle)

You can ask your physio or midwife to assess whether you have a significant gap between the two sides of your stomach muscles.

More than 2.7cm is considered problematic, and if you notice this is not resolving you should get in contact with your women’s health physiotherapist.

## Returning to exercise

- Pilates
- Low impact
- Incremental/interval

It is important to ensure your wound is healed before considering returning to swimming (usually around 6 weeks).

Start off with low impact exercise such as yoga, pilates, static bike and walking before returning to higher impact exercise such as running.

There is a **DRAM drop-in session** for you to ask questions related to **exercise and DRAM**, running **every Monday 2pm-3pm.**

**Sports & Social Club, Heath Park**

Please check our websites for the details before coming:

[www.cardiffandvaleuhb.wales.nhs.uk/](http://www.cardiffandvaleuhb.wales.nhs.uk/)