



Government of **Western Australia**
North Metropolitan Health Service
Women and Newborn Health Service

Postnatal Physiotherapy Information for Aboriginal Women



 **HealthyWA**
healthywa.wa.gov.au

WNHS
Community
Advisory Council

your
voice

The Women and Newborn Health Service respectfully acknowledges the Noongar people, both past and present, the traditional owners of the land on which we work.

The Women and Newborn Health Service also recognises, respects and values Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander cultures as we walk a new path together.



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Good Bladder and Bowel Habits

To keep your pelvic floor muscles strong and healthy, it is important to have good weeing (bladder) and pooing (bowel) habits.

Good weeing habits:

- Drink lots of water (2 to 3 litres).
- Go to the loo when you need to (not 'just in case').
- Relax on the toilet and let the wee come out without pushing.
- Avoid coffee or soft drinks, even diet ones.

Good pooing habits:

- Drink lots of water (2 to 3 litres).
- Don't push too hard when you are doing a poo.
- Eat lots of fruit and vegies.
- Do regular exercise.
- Don't wait too long when you feel the urge to do a poo. *If the feeling goes, it will be hard to poo and you may feel you need to push.*
- Lean forward when you sit on the toilet and rest your elbows on your knees. Relax your belly and keep your back straight. Breathe normally so that you don't hold your breath.

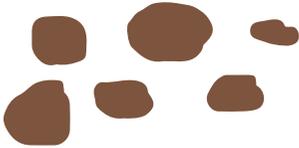


Constipation

This is when:

- Your poo is very hard and difficult to push out
- You poo less than 3 times a week; or
- When you have to push really hard to do a poo.

If you have to push really hard to get the poo out, it can weaken your pelvic floor muscles. Drink lots of water and eat fruit and vegies to keep the poo soft and easy to push out.



Constipated – Hard, dry poo



Healthy – Soft and smooth poo

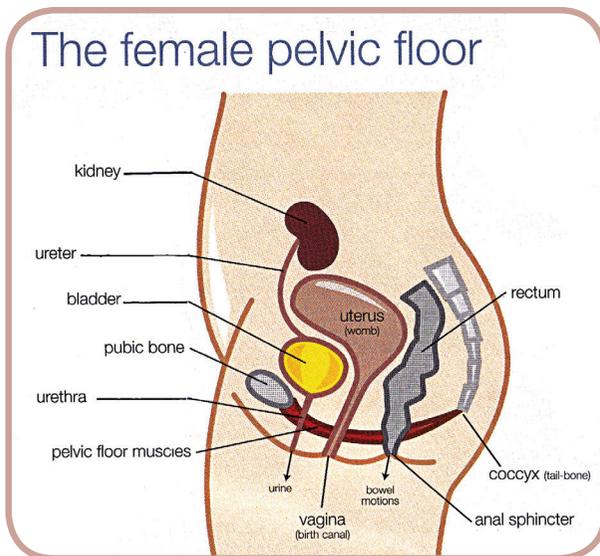
If you have stitches near your vagina, you can provide support to the wound by wrapping toilet paper around your fingers and holding the area.

Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

It's important that you work the right muscles. If you are not sure about the right muscles, talk to your midwife, physiotherapist, doctor, nurse or health worker

Try to do this exercise:

- Pull your vagina (front/birth passage) up inside you.
Pull up from below, and squeeze and hold.
This is like holding in pee or stopping a pee once it has started.
- Tighten the ring of muscle around the back passage,
like you are holding in a fart.
- Try to do both these front and back muscle pull-ups at the same time.
- Hold the lift for 1 to 2 normal breaths.



Exercise After Giving Birth

When you start exercising again, start with little amounts and build up over a few weeks to bigger amounts. Feed baby before exercising, to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of full breasts. Avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby for 6 weeks.

Remember, exercise is important for every stage of your life, not just after having a baby.

Here are some examples of exercises you can do to strengthen your tummy muscles (abdominals) and pelvic floor:

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent, draw in your pelvic floor and tummy muscles like in the other exercise. Flatten your back on the floor by tilting your hip bones towards you.
Hold for 5 seconds then relax. Try and repeat this 10 times.



2. Lie on your back with your knees bent; gently roll both knees from side to side. Make sure your shoulders stay flat on the bed or floor.



3. Sit in a chair, put your left hand on the inside part of your right knee. Push your hand and knee together, making sure you stay nice and still. You should feel your tummy muscles tighten.
Do this for 5 seconds, and then repeat about 5 - 10 times. Then do the same with your other hand and leg.

Back Care

It's very important to look after your back after having a baby. Pregnancy can make your ligaments and muscles weaker. These are some things you can do to help protect your back:

- 1. Avoid bending over low tables/beds**
Try having work surfaces at belly button height.
- 2. When you have to lift something up**
Draw in your pelvic floor muscles and your tummy muscles. Don't hold your breath.
- 3. If you are sitting on the floor with baby**
Try leaning your back against something for support, and don't hunch.



4. When feeding baby

Sit in a chair with a pillow under baby for support. Try to switch between watching baby and looking up, so your neck doesn't get too sore. You can also try feeding baby while lying on your side.



Caesarean Birth (C-Section)

After a C-section, it may take 6-12 weeks for your body to heal. It is important that you rest and only do light activity during the first 6 weeks to give your body time to heal.

- Do not lift anything heavier than baby until after 6 weeks.
- Make sure you rest if you feel tired or sore.
- If you have other babies or young children at home, it would be a good idea to ask family or friends to stay with you and help out.

You can do the exercises that are in this booklet when you feel comfortable doing them, around day 3 after your C-section.

Walking is also good to help with your fitness.

Start walking a little bit (about 10 minutes) each day.

You can start walking more when you feel comfortable doing so.

It is important that you protect your tummy muscles while your body is still healing. If you are lying down on your back, don't sit straight up. This could hurt your tummy muscles or your wound.

This is a good way to get out of bed:



1. Roll on to your side.



2. Push up with your hand and elbow.



3. Swing your legs over the edge of the bed and sit up.

Diabetes and Obesity

Diabetes:

Diabetes may also increase the risk of leaking pee. If you have lots of sugar in your blood, it may cause damage to the muscles that close off the tubes that carry your pee from your bladder.

Too much sugar in your blood can also make you pee more often than normal. This can make it hard to control the sudden urge to pee and make you pee small amounts often.

Uncontrolled Diabetes can damage the nerves that tell you when your bladder is full and the nerves that tell certain muscles to squeeze your bladder to help it empty. People with diabetes are also more likely to have constipation, which can weaken pelvic floor muscles.

Obesity:

Being very overweight can also make you more likely to leak pee. The increased weight around your tummy can push down on your pelvic floor, stretching it and making it weak.

If you are a healthy weight it will lower your chance of getting type 2 diabetes.

Smoking and Incontinence

Smoking can make you cough a lot and this can weaken the muscles that control your bladder and it may cause you to leak pee.

If you stop smoking, it will give your pelvic floor muscles a break from all the increased pressure, so there is less chance for the muscles to become weak.



Breathing and Relaxation

Relaxation skills are a good way to help keep yourself and baby calm. Relaxation can help with lots of things, including energy levels, stress levels and even the release of milk.

When you are stressed, you may feel like your muscles are very tight, you might be moody or have a headache. When you have these symptoms, releasing muscle tension by stretching and slowly breathing in and out may help.



Position of tension:

- Shoulders up.
- Chin poking out.
- Hunched.



Position of relaxation:

- Shoulders down.
- Good posture.



Baby Massage

Baby massage can help relax both you and baby. Here are some points that may help you with baby massage:

- Use massage when baby is quiet and settled.
- Have baby as undressed as possible.
- Use your warm and soft hands with as much hand contact as possible.
- When baby is lying on back, use diagonal strokes from shoulder to opposite hip. When baby is lying on tummy, Use long strokes down the back.



Reasons to see a Women's Health Physiotherapist

If you experience any of the below issues within the first six months after the birth of your baby, please contact the KEMH Physiotherapy Department on (08) 6458 2790 - you do not require a doctor's referral if you had your baby at KEMH.

- back, neck, tailbone or wrist pain
- painful scar tissue (caesarean, episiotomy, tear)
- pain during sexual intercourse
- weak or separated stomach muscles
- blocked milk ducts or mastitis
- cracked nipples
- bladder or bowel problems:
 - leakage of urine, wind, stool
 - urgency to pass urine or to use bowels
 - passing urine frequently
 - pain
- pelvic floor weakness or vaginal 'heaviness'.



If you live in Perth and if it has been more than six months since your baby's birth or you would prefer to attend a physiotherapy clinic closer to home please see the list of women's health physiotherapy services on the right. You may need a GP/doctor's referral.

If you are returning to rural or remote areas please contact your local Aboriginal Health Worker, Nurse, Doctor or Aboriginal Medical Service. You may also need a GP/doctors referral.

**For further information,
Contact KEMH Physiotherapy Department on 08 6458 2790**



Useful contacts

Public Women's Health Physiotherapy

Armadale Kelmscott Health Service

(referral required)
(08) 9391 2281

Bentley Health Service

(referral required)
(08) 9334 3791

Fiona Stanley Hospital

(referral required)
(08) 6152 2222

Fremantle Hospital

(referral required)
(08) 9431 2533

Joondalup Health Campus

(general physiotherapy - referral
required)
(08) 9400 9430

King Edward Memorial Hospital

(no referral required if you delivered
at KEMH less than six months ago)
(08) 6458 2790

Mandurah Community Health Centre

(referral required)
(08) 9586 4400

Midland Hospital

(referral required)
(08) 9462 4030

Osborne Park Hospital

(referral required)
(08) 9346 8439

Rockingham Kwinana District Hospital

(referral required)
(08) 9592 0600

Royal Perth Hospital

(referral required)
(08) 9224 2076

Private Women's Health Physiotherapy

Ring the Australian Physiotherapy
Association on (08) 9389 9211 or go
to www.physiotherapy.asn.au and
click on 'Continence and Women's
Health WA' for the number of a
physiotherapist in your area.

No referral required.



This document can be made available
in alternative formats on request for
a person with a disability.

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WOMEN AND NEWBORN HEALTH SERVICE
King Edward Memorial Hospital

374 Bagot Road Subiaco WA 6008

Telephone: (08) 6458 2222

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