



Patient Information

EXERCISE AFTER A BABY:

Looking after yourself as you return to exercise

Congratulations! Now that you have a new little one to look after, you can't forget to look after yourself as well. It can be a very busy time for new mothers, but there are some exercises you can do to get started.



Pelvic Floor Exercises:

From days 2-3 after giving birth you can start doing pelvic floor exercises. These involve a "squeeze and lift" action of the muscles at the base of your pelvis. You should not feel your abdominal muscles working hard or a pushing or straining feeling. The main things to remember when doing these exercises is that you keep breathing and you don't use your bottom muscles – no one should be able to tell that you are doing your pelvic floor exercises!

Initially when doing pelvic floor exercises you may find that the muscle contraction feels different than it did before the birth, particularly if you have had a vaginal delivery. This is a common feeling and strength will improve in time as you do your pelvic floor exercises. Strong pelvic floor muscles are important for continence as well as looking after your back.

Aim to squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscle and hold for as long as you are able too. This may be only 2-3 seconds initially. You should feel a relaxation of the muscle as you 'let go'. If you don't feel the muscle relax, it means the muscle has already fatigued and the muscle has already relaxed. Hold for less time until you can feel the 'let go'. Aim to build up how long you can hold each pelvic floor contraction for, ideally reaching 10 seconds by 12 weeks post-natal. It is recommended you build up to doing 10 x contractions of 10 second holds, 3 times per day.

Tummy Exercises:

Kneeling on all 4's, relax your tummy while still keeping your back flat. Then gently draw the lower portion of your abdomen (between your belly button and pubic bone) in towards your spine. It's not a big movement. You shouldn't feel all of your abdominals contracting, or



Fitwise Physiotherapy Pty Ltd ABN 72 350 151 597

EAST MELBOURNE

372 Albert St East Melbourne VIC 3002

ARMADALE

1095 (Rear) High St Armadale VIC 3143

P 03 9486 0512 F 03 9486 0513

fitwise@fitwise.com.au

www.fitwise.com.au



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your bottom muscles. Your back stays still, long and flat. Aim to hold this contraction for 2-3 seconds to start with and just like your pelvic floor muscles, build to holding for 10 seconds x 10 repetitions. Try to do this exercise once per day.

Week 1:

You can start some gentle short walks if you feel up to it, e.g. around the block. Aim to go for no longer than 10-20 minutes per walk in the first two weeks. Where possible, try and avoid taking the pram or carrying your newborn as this is an extra load on your body and pelvic floor while it is still trying to recover after the birth.

Weeks 2-6:

You can increase the length of your walks by 10 minutes each week as long as your pelvic floor muscles are able to cope with standing. You shouldn't be leaking while you walk.

Whenever you feel comfortable to sit on a stationary bike seat, you can do some cycling. Most women find this can take 3-4 weeks at least before they feel comfortable. Avoid standing up on the pedals at this early stage.

After Week 6:

Once you have had your 6 week obstetrician check-up, your wounds have healed and you have stopped any discharge/bleeding, swimming is a great way to do some cardio exercise. It is low impact and horizontal – perfect for your pelvic floor muscles!

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After Week 12:

You should not consider returning to high-impact exercise until at least the 12 week mark. This is because all the ligaments in your body – including pelvis, hips, knees, ankles and back – will still be more elastic until this time. You need your pelvic floor muscles to also be strong enough to cope with any running, bouncing and impact so you don't leak while doing these exercises.

High impact exercise includes things such as running, netball, tennis, jumping. You should be able to pass the Pelvic Floor Stress test (see below) before you slowly begin doing these activities again. Your pelvic floor should be strong enough so you don't leak when doing this exercise. Some women don't feel ready to return to running for 6-9 months. It's worth remembering it took your body 9 months to have a baby, so it may take just as long to return to your pre-baby fitness. If you are leaking when you return to high impact exercise, we strongly advise you seek help from a Women's Health physiotherapist experienced in Pelvic Floor Rehabilitation. We have several physiotherapists who can help you at Fitwise!



Pelvic Floor Stress Test:

Do 10 star jumps with a cough on each jump whilst having a reasonably full bladder. You should not leak when doing this. If you do leak a little, then you need to keep going with your pelvic floor exercises before returning to high-impact exercise.

- ❖ This information is a general overview of a non-specific nature regarding exercise. It is not intended to be diagnostic and must be considered in conjunction with the individual's complete medical history and a comprehensive physical examination. Individuals with pain should contact their doctor and / or the Australian Physiotherapy Association to find a local physiotherapist to assist with their management and when beginning a new exercise program.

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