

Gynaecology – Advice and Exercises Following Gynaecology Surgery

Introduction

The advice contained in this leaflet will help you recover from your surgery and return to normal activities. In general you will recover more quickly if your surgery was performed through the vagina than if you have had abdominal surgery. However we are all different and the rate we recover depends on factors such as age, lifestyle and fitness.

Guidance for Patients

Immediately after surgery

The physiotherapist will visit you following your operation to give you advice and teach you your exercises. It is important that you start to move around as soon as possible so if you are in pain let the physiotherapist or nursing staff know. Pain can make it difficult to move and slow your recovery.

Breathing exercises

- Sit or lie comfortably supported
- Breathe in gently through your nose, feeling your waist gently swell, hold for 3 seconds and sigh out slowly through your mouth. Repeat 3 or 4 times
- If you have some phlegm on your chest following your operation these exercises will help to clear it.
- Do these exercises every hour

You will not harm yourself if you need to cough or sneeze but it will be more comfortable if you support yourself. Bend your knees up slightly and place your hands or a pillow over your wound (abdominal surgery) or between your legs over your sanitary pad (vaginal surgery).

Foot and ankle exercises

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Chair: Deborah Evans

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These exercises will improve the blood circulation and help to prevent blood clots. Do these exercises every hour until you are up and about and moving well • When lying or sitting bend your feet and ankles up and down for 20 – 30 seconds

My Planned Care Patient Information Platform

We think it is important that women have the opportunity to discuss any problems they may have, to prevent problems occurring in the future and ensure a full return to fitness. Topics covered will include:

- The normal working of the bladder and bowel, and how to make sure they function efficiently
- Pelvic floor muscle exercises
- Posture and back care
- Exercise advice

What will happen in the class?

- The group will consist of a maximum of 15 women
- For most of the session you will be sitting in an informal group
- You will not be asked any personal questions
- You do not need to wear any special clothing

What will happen after the class?

We hope you will be on your way to resolving any problems you may have and are confident to continue your exercises at home. If not, you will have the opportunity to arrange an individual appointment with a specialist physiotherapist.

How will I know when to come?

You will receive an invitation in the post approximately 4 weeks after your surgery and we would be grateful if you could let the Physiotherapy Department know if you are able to attend.

Housework

Care should be taken for the first 6 weeks following major surgery. Only lift light loads e.g. a litre bottle of water weighs about 2lbs (1kg). When lifting, bend your knees & keep your back straight, pull in your tummy & tighten your pelvic floor muscles. Hold the object close to you. Avoid standing for long periods. Many household chores can be done sitting down e.g. ironing, preparing vegetables.

Sport and exercise

You should be able to gradually return to your normal exercise routine after approximately 6 weeks. High impact exercise and contact sports may require longer. You should not swim or use a swimming pool for 6 weeks

Employment

You will be able to return to work more quickly if your job is part time or not physically demanding. In general you can return after

- Abdominal surgery – 6/8 weeks
- Vaginal surgery – 4/6 weeks

However the type and extent of the surgery is individual and you should check with your surgeon or GP.

Sexual Activity

Resuming sexual intercourse depends on the type of surgery you have had and how

you feel, but may be 6 weeks or less following your operation. You should check with your surgeon before you leave hospital.

Getting in & out of bed

Bend your knees up and with your feet on the bed roll onto your side. Allow your legs to swing over the edge of the bed while pushing yourself up with your arms. To get back to bed reverse the procedure.

Walking

You may want to stoop when you are walking but it will be more comfortable if you stand and walk tall. Try and pull your tummy muscles in gently. Remember do not expect too much of yourself, you may tire quickly.

Going to the Toilet

You may have a catheter for a few days after your surgery. When the catheter is removed make sure you can sit comfortably on the toilet or commode with your feet supported. Relax, give yourself time and allow the urine to flow.

Your bowels may take time to return to normal after your operation. Your motions should be soft and easy to pass. You may initially need to take laxatives to avoid straining and constipation. When opening your bowels it may help to support the area in front of the back passage with a folded sanitary towel or a wad of toilet paper. If you have an abdominal wound you may like to support your tummy with a folded towel.

If you do have problems opening your bowels, it may help to place a small footstool under your feet when you are sitting on the toilet so your knees are higher than your hips. If possible, lean forwards and rest your arms on top of your legs to avoid straining.

Ensure that your body has all the nutrients it needs by eating a healthy balanced diet.

A healthy diet is a high-fibre diet (fruit, vegetables, wholegrain bread and cereal) with up to 2 litres a day of fluid intake, mainly water. Remember to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day.

Abdominal Exercises

Your abdominal muscles are the natural corset supporting your back and internal organs. The following exercises may help to relieve backache or wind.

This exercise may be done lying on your back with your knees bent, lying comfortably on your side, or sitting with your back well supported.

Place a hand on your tummy below your tummy button. • Breathe in normally through your nose. As you breathe out draw your tummy in gently away from your hand and towards your spine. Relax.

General Advice

This advice will help you return to normal activities. Even when your operation site has healed the deeper tissues will go on healing. Remember that the rate of recovery varies with every individual. Generally it takes longer to recover from abdominal surgery than it does for vaginal surgery. Listen to your body.

Walking

Walking is an excellent exercise. As you feel more comfortable, increase the amount of walking you do each day. It is better to do 2 shorter walks than 1 long one. For example by 4 weeks following surgery you should be able to walk briskly for a period of 15 to 20 minutes (approx 1 mile) twice a day.

Driving

Returning to driving will depend on the type of operation you have had and your rate of recovery. You should ensure you can comfortably

- Manoeuvre the car
- Wear a seat belt
- Do an emergency stop
- Concentrate

You may also need to check terms and conditions with your insurance company. In general you should be fit to drive.

You should be able to drive at 4-6 weeks following your surgery.

Emotions

Having surgery can also be emotionally stressful and many women feel tearful and emotional at first – when you are tired these feelings can seem worse. For many women this is often the last symptom to improve.

How to do pelvic floor muscle exercises

Sit, stand or lie comfortably with your knees slightly apart. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing urine or wind and slowly squeeze and lift the muscles, drawing up and closing around the front and back passages.

Hold the squeeze and lift for a few seconds, starting gently if you have had vaginal surgery. Gradually try and increase the time you can hold time to 10 seconds and repeat it up to 10 times.

When you cough or sneeze it is important that your pelvic floor muscles can work quickly. Practise squeezing and letting go quickly and strongly several times.

The pelvic floor muscles work closely together with the deep tummy muscles so you may feel some tension around the lower tummy when doing this exercise – this is

normal.

However you should not:

- squeeze your legs together
- hold your breath
- tighten your buttocks

These exercises should be repeated for 3 to 4 sessions daily. You should try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before any activity that requires effort e.g. lifting.

It is a good idea to practise these exercises regularly for the rest of your life – ‘use it or lose it’!

When you have learnt this exercise you can practise holding your tummy in gently while you breathe in and out normally. Try to increase the time you can hold it to 10 seconds

Pelvic Tilting

- Lying on your back with knees bent. Pull in your tummy muscles gently rocking your pelvis backwards and pressing the small of your back into the bed.
- Hold for the count of five and let go slowly
- Repeat this exercise 3 times if you can

Knee Rolling

- Lying on your back with knees bent
- Pull in your tummy muscles, gently roll both knees to the right (as far as is

comfortable) then gently roll to the left

- Do this 3 times each side if you can
- Aim to do 3 exercise sessions daily
- Start gently with these exercises
- Gradually increase the number that you do
- Do not hold your breath
- Listen to your body – stop if it hurts or you are tired
- Never do a 'sit up' with your legs straight • Never do a 'double leg lift' (i.e. lift both legs together) from lying

Pelvic Floor Exercises

The pelvic floor muscles are a broad sling of muscles stretching from the pubic bone at the front to the tail bone at the back. They are an important group of muscles that help to:

- support the pelvic organs (bladder, bowel and womb)
- control the bladder and bowel
- and are also important for sexual enjoyment

You need to exercise your pelvic floor to:

- prevent leakage from the bladder or bowel
- help to prevent prolapse If you have a catheter in your bladder wait to start these

exercises until you are passing urine normally. If you have had abdominal surgery, or vaginal surgery and a repair start gently as comfort allows.

If you have had a TOT or a TVT procedure you should wait 6 weeks before you start pelvic floor exercises.

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

If it is not an emergency please contact the NHS 111 service.

Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit www.nhs.uk. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Life Threatening Emergencies

For something life threatening – severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains – please dial 999.

Additional Support

For advice and support for a healthier lifestyle please contact Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust ghc.nhs.uk and/or Healthy Lifestyles Gloucestershire hlglos.org