



## SYNERGY PHYSIO

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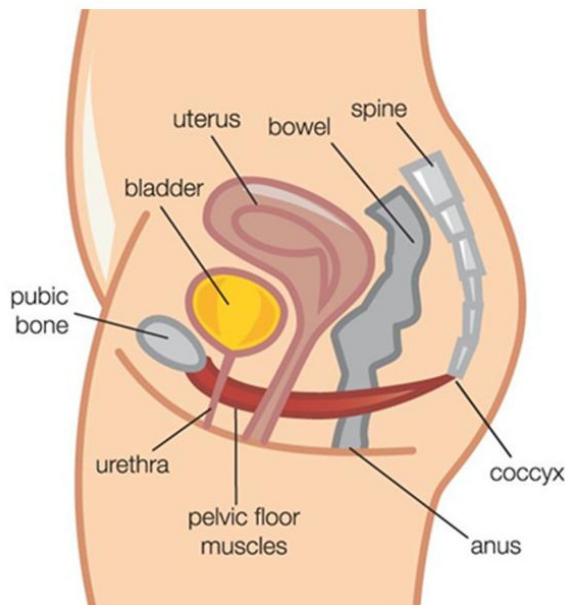
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## *Pelvic Floor Advice for New Mums*

Congratulations on the birth of your new baby! In this busy time it will be important to remember some simple tips and advice to ensure your recovery to optimal health. Looking after your pelvic floor now and developing habits to ensure your pelvic floor health can prevent problems of pelvic organ prolapse or incontinence down the track.



Your pelvic floor consists of a sling of muscles (a bit like a trampoline) that connect your pubic bone at the front, to your tail bone at the back. Your pelvic floor supports your internal organs and also controls your bladder and bowel. When any muscle is stretched or has trauma, sometimes it can be difficult to activate again for a short time. It is important to know how to accurately contract your pelvic floor after delivery and you may need specific assessment from a pelvic floor physiotherapist to determine if you are contracting your muscles the right way.

**When learning to contract your pelvic floor again:** Try to imagine you are gently stopping the flow of urine by lifting your bladder muscles upward and inward very gently. Can you hold this contraction and continue to breathe for a few breaths? Can you increase the number of breaths you are able to hold this contraction for? As you gain confidence can you increase the strength of contraction? Try to relax your muscles completely between contractions.

**Common errors to avoid** when starting to exercise and strengthen your pelvic floor again include squeezing you coccyx or buttock muscles (try to make the contraction more at the front rather than around the back passage), squeezing your inner thigh muscles, holding your breath or bearing down (meaning your upper abdominals contract, your belly pushes out and there is downward pressure on the floor). Try to make sure you avoid these common mistakes as these errors can develop into bad habits that don't assist in pelvic floor function or optimal health.

**Early days:**

Remember to take plenty of rest periods. It can take 6 to 12 weeks to recover from delivery and rest is an important part of the recovery process. Try not to sit or stand for excessive periods- lie down and rest frequently. If you are resting, ensure you are not slumped- lying on your side or flat on your back is preferable.

To get in and out of bed, bend your knees one at a time, gently activate your pelvic floor and log roll onto one side. Allow your feet to drop over the side of the bed pushing into upright through your arms. This will prevent excessive downward pressure from your upper abdominals in getting up and out of bed.

When you are on the toilet try not to slump, but sit upright and forward or lean your elbows on your knees and allow your stomach to relax and hang. For the first week you may want to support your stitches or perineum with some tissues as you empty your bowel. Do not strain, push down, tense your abdominals or push your rib cage. Relax your pelvic floor throughout, and then once you have finished try to contract your pelvic floor muscles upward once more. After using the toilet is a great time to practice your pelvic floor contraction!

Avoid constipation as straining can cause more downward pressure and stress on the pelvic floor. Drink plenty of water and ensure you are eating enough fruit and vegetables. Ask your midwife or pharmacist for assistance with medication in the early days if needed.

**Building Strength as time progresses:**

Once you have ensured you have an accurate pelvic floor contraction (avoiding the “common errors”) you can work at two types of contraction. Firstly you can work at increasing the length of time you hold gentle contractions (whilst continuing to breathe). You can also work increasing the strength or power of your contractions, held for only short moments. Remember to try and relax between each contraction. It is often more beneficial to practice in a standing position rather than a sitting position, or if this is too difficult try practicing in sidelying or on your back.



Avoid exercise such as heavy lifting or sit-ups in the first 12 weeks (possibly longer). If you can imagine your abdominal cavity like a water balloon- if you squeeze the top of a water balloon, the bottom half can stretch outward and downward. You do not want this happening to your pelvic floor! Sit ups can focus on the upper half of the abdominals and increase downward pressure on the floor. Focus instead on rebuilding your strength in the lower half

and internal pelvic floor muscles before trying activities like sit ups. Impact exercise such as running should also be avoided for the first 12 weeks or longer as this too can create downward pressure of the pelvic organs onto your floor.

If in doubt make an appointment with a pelvic floor physiotherapist to individual assessment and advice.