



# National Maternity Hospital

Vita Gloriosa Vita ~ Life Glorious Life

## Physiotherapy Department – Advice and Exercise following Major Gynaecological Surgery

### Please read and bring this leaflet for your hospital stay

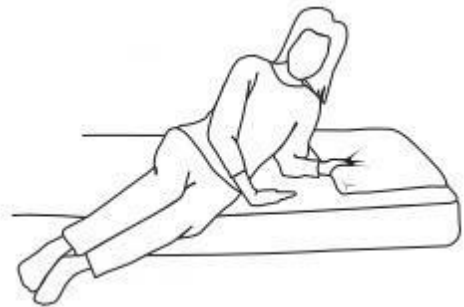
Following your surgery, it is important you allow your body some rest in order to recover. Listen to your body, do not push yourself too much. Do not expect too much too soon and be kind to yourself. Accept offers of help from friends and family if available.

Most of your body's changes will return to normal automatically over time. The key is to start small and build slowly.

#### Early Days: Moving to get out of bed:

Trying to sit up from lying and lowering yourself back is likely to be uncomfortable.

- Bend your up knees.
- Turn your head in the direction you want to roll and bring your arm across your body.
- Moving the shoulders and hips together and roll on to your side.
- Move your legs off the edge of the bed
- Push yourself up sideways on your elbow, supporting your stomach with the other hand if needed.
- Do the reverse to get back into bed: Sit on the edge of the bed, lie onto your side, bring your legs onto the bed and roll yourself onto your back.



**Short frequent walks** are good for circulation and for preventing discomfort and pain. Try to take a few short walks along the ward. When walking, try to stand up straight and tall. If resting, try changing position regularly to prevent stiffness. You can gradually increase your walking pace and distance over time once you go home.

**Trapped Wind:** Some people experience discomfort in their stomach from trapped wind.

The following may help:

- Massaging your stomach gently in a clockwise direction
- Lie on the bed with knees bent up and feet on the bed; roll your knees gently from side to side, in a comfortable range
- Walking and moving little and often.

**Chest care:** Take two or three deep breaths hourly to allow full lung expansion. When coughing, sneezing or laughing, bend your knees and support your operation site with your hands to prevent pain. Using a folded towel or pillow may also provide additional comfort.

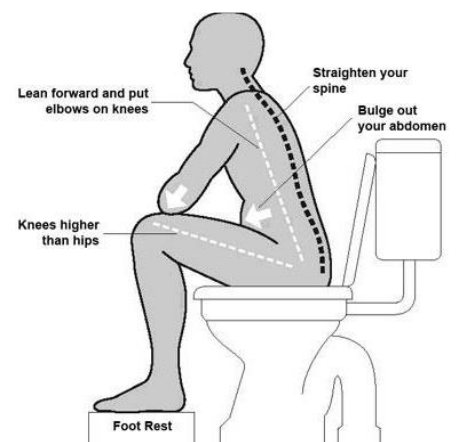
## Bowel Care

A lot of people find that they are anxious to pass their first bowel movement after any gynaecology surgery but there is no need to be. These simple steps can help:

- Try to drink at least 1-2 litres fluid daily.
- Try not to miss meals. Eat breakfast straight away after getting up to allow your digestive system time to work before you leave the house.
- Don't delay going to the loo once you have the urge to empty your bowels
- Don't rush give yourself time to go
- Sit in a comfortable position, which allows the pelvic floor to relax (see above)
- If you feel a pressure from the back passage, it can help to apply a little counter-pressure with a folded maternity pad at the front, over the clitoris
- Exercise helps to stimulate digestion e.g. walking
- Ask your doctor about any medications you are prescribed. Some may be causing constipation, so you may need to make allowances for this.
- Avoid relying on laxatives; use for short term only.

## Passing a Bowel Movement in 4 Easy Steps

1. Sit down on toilet. Using a footstool (or two phonebooks), lean forward with feet apart and forearms on thighs. Keep the back straight (see diagram). This position helps to relax the muscles in the pelvic floor, which is important for easy emptying.
2. Practice breathing exercises feeling tummy swell out as you inhale and pelvic floor drop down and relax. Imagine a big beach ball filling up with air. Your tummy is the front of the ball and the pelvic floor is the bottom
3. Focus on releasing the pelvic floor; imagine an elevator, starting at ground level, draw the muscles up a little (level 1), then up a little more (level 2), up a little more (level 3), then slowly relax down to level 2, down to level 1, down to ground floor, down again to basement and imagine the doors opening.



4. When you feel ready to push, bring chin to chest, lean forward a little and push down.

Try to keep the tummy swelled out against your upper thighs throughout. Practise by saying the word 'OOooch' feeling the sensation of the tummy swelling out and pressure downwards into the back passage.

*Take your time and relax, don't rush the process.*

### **Exercising Your Pelvic Floor Muscles**

It is important following your surgery to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. These muscles are important to prevent leaking and other dysfunction, such as prolapse, both now and also later in life.

In the early days, think of your pelvic floor as a little pump, helping to increase blood flow and promote healing of any stitches. Once you are a little more comfortable, a week or two following your surgery, then you can move on and switch your focus to strengthening these muscles.

Before you start it is important that you can firstly squeeze and tighten the muscle and then **let go completely**. Practice this first, without holding, without counting; simply feel the muscle working and then relaxing. Start with a small comfortable squeeze and build up your holding time and repetitions slowly over time.

Gently squeeze shut your back passage (as if holding back wind), your vagina (as if gripping a tampon) and your urethra (as if stopping your flow of urine) and draw your pelvic floor inwards and upwards. Do this without tightening your buttocks, without holding your breath and without squeezing your legs together

- Your aim is to be able to do 10 holds of 10 seconds each and 10 fast contractions.
- Begin by finding out how long you can hold the contraction for and how many you can repeat at each session and gradually build up to the '**magnificent 10**'.
- It is important that you keep breathing naturally whilst doing the exercises
- Make sure to give yourself time in between each exercise to **let go** of the pelvic floor muscles completely

### **Sexual Intercourse**

It is preferable to wait six weeks until your GP/Consultant check up to ensure stitches are fully healed.

Resume intercourse when you feel ready and understand that this may take time.

Be patient with yourself and open with your partner about how you feel.

You are the best person to know when your body has fully recovered and you feel emotionally and physically ready to resume sexual relations.

Find a position most comfortable for you, use plenty of lubrication and start gently. If you have any concerns about physical or emotional issues which prevent you resuming normal sexual relations with you partner or if you have persistent discomfort or pain with intercourse discuss this with your GP/Women's Health Physiotherapist.

## Going Home

Remember it takes time to get over any surgery and it will take time for you to heal. Increase your level of activity gradually as you feel able to. You may feel very tired when you go home, so don't overdo it, pace yourself and limit your visitors.

**Allow yourself time to rest and recover.** It is important to take good care of yourself, you will be surprised how tired you feel in the next few days and weeks so take things at your own pace.

## Returning to Activity

Exercise has many positive effects on both your physical and emotional wellbeing. Try to build a little exercise in to your day from soon after you go home. Start slowly and listen to your body. Your aim is to simply move every day, whether that's a few stretches on the floor or a small walk.

- Walking is the safest and easiest type of exercise to begin with. Start slowly and build up speed and distance gradually
- It is safe to swim again once any wounds have healed. This may be following your six week check-up
- Low impact exercise is safe to resume after approximately 6-8 weeks, for example: Pilates and yoga
- High impact exercise such as aerobics, running, and resistance/weight training can generally be resumed gradually no sooner 12 weeks but some people will take a little longer.

Try to be in tune with your body, if any exercise feels uncomfortable or painful or if you are experiencing any leaking, don't continue and seek advice from a healthcare professional.

## Housework

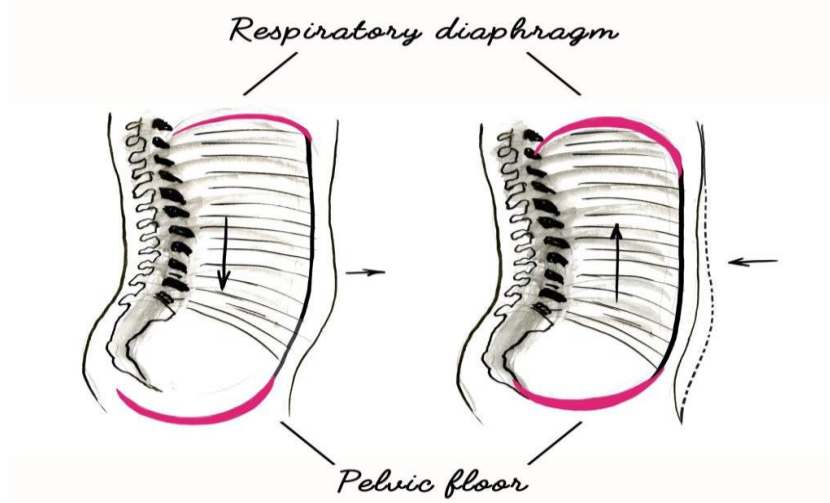
- Avoid activities that cause strain to your abdomen and pelvic floor during the first few weeks, e.g. prolonged standing.
- Accept offers of help with housework
- In the first 6 weeks try to avoid hoovering and heavy lifting, e.g. a basket of wet washing.

## Diaphragmatic Breathing

Correct breathing lays the foundation for healing and strengthening through your 'core'. Being able to "just breathe" in the early days following surgery you begin the healing process by rehabbing the deep abdominals, the diaphragm and the pelvic floor. It allows you to build the core foundation you need for daily movements and to prepare your body for returning to exercise.

The diaphragm is the muscle that sits just below your lungs. It helps to think of your abdomen like a cylinder. Your pelvic floor makes up the bottom of the cylinder, your diaphragm is the top of the cylinder and your tummy and back muscles will make up the walls of the cylinder. In order for recovery we need to ensure all elements of this 'core cylinder' are co-ordinated.

So whether you are trying to heal after surgery, want to strengthen and return to activity or are looking to rehab your pelvic floor muscles, the process starts with the breath. Think of this simple form of breath as the foundations needed to build a strong core. This is why it is one of the most important exercises you can do



### **What is diaphragmatic breathing?**

- Sit comfortably with one hand on your chest and one on your belly
- Become aware of your breath, imagine your diaphragm muscle moving up and down as you breathe
- When you inhale, your belly will rise and expand as your lungs fill with air and your diaphragm moves down to accommodate your full lungs. Your pelvic floor mimics the movement of your diaphragm. As the diaphragm moves down, the pelvic floor lets go of tension and relaxes. Draw your attention to your perineum and back passage and direct your 'letting go' to this area
- As you exhale, feel your belly fall and contract as your diaphragm moves back upward and the pelvic floor switches on and begins to rise. As you exhale try to incorporate a pelvic floor 'lift' and gently engage your deep tummy muscles.
- Repeat this process of deep inhalation and exhalation for 10-15 breaths

### **What are the benefits of diaphragmatic breathing?**

Aside from providing functional strength, some of the other benefits of diaphragmatic breathing are:

- Helping to reduce stress and anxiety by tapping into our parasympathetic nervous system. You can use your breath almost as a form of meditation (Think about relaxed breathing as you slowly inhale and exhale)
- Helping with overall healing and treatment of conditions such as incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse

Diaphragmatic breathing sets the foundation for true core function, healing and strength.

So try to "just breathe" in the days or weeks following your surgery. Trust that something as simple as your breath can bring about foundational results that will keep you strong and moving well for life.

**Do not be afraid of exercise and activity because of your surgery. Think of all the movements you do on a daily basis. Normal movement is important for function.**

Your abdominal muscles help to support your back, maintain good posture and help with bowel and bladder function your bladder and bowel.

The following exercises will help strengthen and tone your abdominal muscles. These exercises should feel comfortable and pain free. Start with 5 repetitions and gradually increase as these become easier. If you like you can start with exercise one and week by week add in a new exercise as you work through the programme

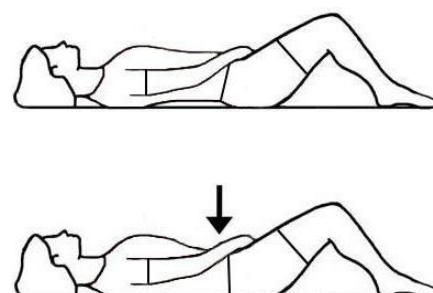
### **Exercise 1: Deep abdominal muscles**

- Lay on your back with your knees bent and head supported.
- Place your hands on your stomach below your belly button.
- Breathe in through your nose, and as you breathe out draw your stomach in away from your hands towards your spine.
- Keep your stomach pulled in and hold
- Progress to do this exercise in sitting and standing.

*Use these deep abdominal muscles when doing activities that require effort such as lifting*

### **Exercise 2: Pelvic Tilt**

- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Pull in your stomach, tighten your pelvic floor muscles and tilt your pelvis by gently flattening your back into the bed.
- Hold for 3- 5 seconds breathing normally, then relax.
- Progress by trying different positions such as sitting, standing, side lying.



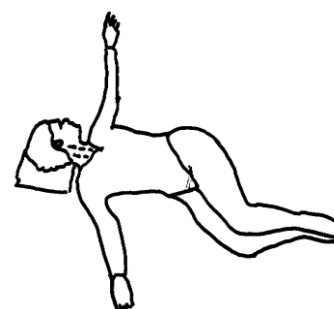
### Exercise 3: Knee Rolling

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Gently pull in your lower abdominals (see exercise 1)
- Inhale to prepare and as you exhale gently roll your two knees to the left side
- Inhale to come back to the centre
- Exhale to roll the knees down to the opposite side.



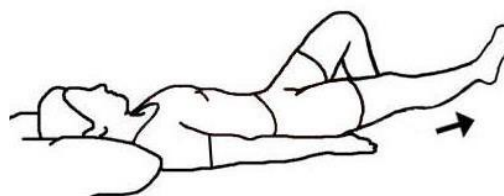
### Exercise 4: Arm Opening

- Lying on your side.
- Breathe in and reach the upper arm forward and up.
- Breathe out as you bring the arm back and over behind your back.
- Pause for a second, breathe in and bring the arm up and forward, breathing out as you return to the starting position
- Do not force it. Follow your hand with your eyes.



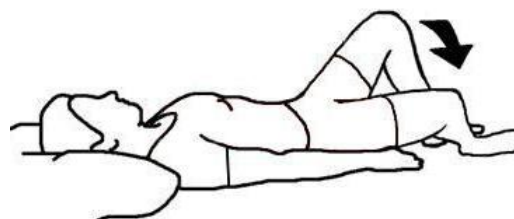
### Exercise 5: Leg slides

- Lie on your back with your knees bent, pull in your stomach and tighten your pelvic floor muscles.
- Gently slide one leg out straight and return.
- Repeat with other leg.



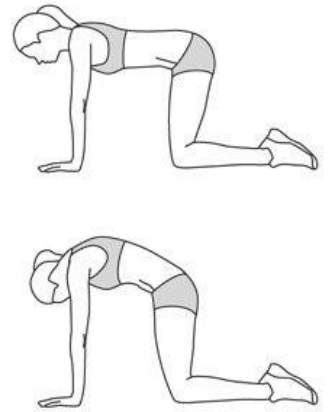
### Exercise 6: Single knee fall out

- Lie on your back with your knees bent, pull in your stomach and tighten your pelvic floor muscles.
- Keeping your pelvis still and stomach pulled in, allow one knee to slowly drop out to the side.
- Slowly bring your knee back to the middle.
- Repeat with the other leg.



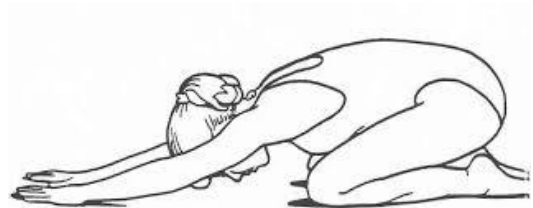
### Exercise 7: Cat and Cow stretch

- Kneeling on all fours, hand under your shoulders and knees under your hips
- Inhale to prepare
- As you exhale engage your lower abdominal muscles and arch your back up towards the ceiling with your tailbone and head down. Try to stretch out any areas of the spine that are stiff
- Press your hands in to the floor and feel the stretch extend in to your upper back and shoulder blades
- Slowly return to start position



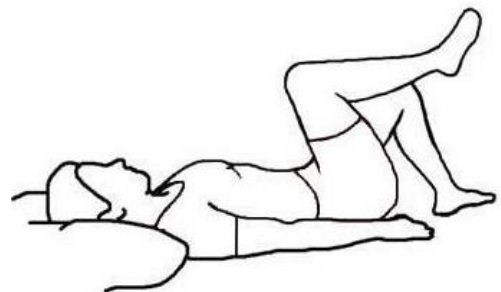
### Exercise 8: Child's Pose

- Kneeling on all 4s
- Bring bum back to heels
- Walk hands out in front until you feel a comfortable stretch in your lower back
- Hold for 30s



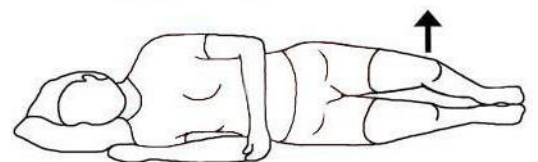
### Exercise 9: Knee bends

- Lie on your back with your knees bent, pull in your stomach and tighten your pelvic floor muscles.
- Slowly lift one leg up off the bed keeping your knee bent. Hold for 10 seconds, then slowly return to the starting position
- Repeat with the other leg.



### Exercise 10: Clam

- Lie on your side with knees bent and feet together, pull in your stomach and tighten your pelvic floor muscles.
- Lift your top leg moving your knees apart but keeping your feet together, keep your pelvis still throughout
- Slowly return to the starting position.
- Repeat with the other leg.



Please see below a link to our YouTube videos which correlate to the exercises in this leaflet:

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLttO1pYTORo0K6jWQpJHpJPKwwfl82dG->