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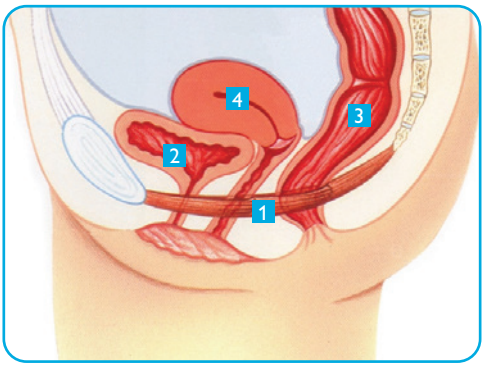


Pelvic floor after pregnancy and childbirth

patient information

THE PELVIC FLOOR

The pelvic floor consists of two layers of muscles. The deeper layer acts like a hammock and supports the pelvis and the pelvic organs. The superficial muscle layer has three openings:
the urethra, the vagina and the anus.



1 pelvic floor muscles
2 bladder
3 intestine
4 uterus

side view of pelvic floor muscles

The pelvic floor has five important functions:

- **Support function:** supports the organs in your pelvis and helps prevent pelvic organ prolapse.
- **Continence function:** closes the urethra and anus to help prevent incontinence (the involuntary leakage of urine or stool).
- **Sexual function:** contributes to the sexual experience.
- **Stabilising function:** supports the lower back and helps prevent back pain.
- **Relaxation function:** relaxes during urination, bowel movements and sexual intercourse.

EFFECT OF PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH ON THE PELVIC FLOOR

Approximately 30% of women experience urine leakage. Pregnancy and childbirth are among the most important risk factors for developing problems later in life. Pelvic floor muscle exercises are therefore very important, both for treating and preventing urine leakage.

TOILET POSTURE TIPS

Passing urine

- Sit down, lean forward with your back relaxed and keep both feet flat on the floor.
- Relax your pelvic floor and wait for the urine to flow spontaneously.
- Never strain to pass urine.
- Stay seated long enough to allow your bladder to empty completely. If necessary, stand up after urinating and sit down again.



Bowel movement

- Sit down, lean forward with your back relaxed and place your feet on a footstool.
- Relax your pelvic floor then gently bear down as you breathe out.
- Do not ignore the urge to go the toilet when you feel the need.



PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE EXERCISES

The aim of the exercises is to:

- Improve muscle strength.
- Improve endurance.
- Promote good relaxation at rest
- Improve coordination (for example, contracting the pelvic floor muscles when coughing, sneezing or lifting).

Exercise 1: strength

Starting position: Lie on your back with your knees bent.

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles by closing and drawing them inwards (as if you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and urine). This exercises both the continence and support functions of these muscles. Then relax your muscles completely for five seconds.

Perform 10 repetitions at least three times a day, while lying on your back, lying on your side, sitting or standing.

> **Important:** When contracting your pelvic floor muscles, there should be no visible movement of the pelvis and you should not tighten your abdominal muscles or glutes.

Exercise 2: endurance

Perform exercise 1, but this time keep your pelvic floor muscles contracted for 3 to 10 seconds after closing and drawing them inwards, before relaxing.

Perform 10 repetitions, allowing 20 seconds of rest between each exercise, at least three times a day.

> **Important:** do not hold your breath during this exercise. Continue to breathe slowly.

Exercise 3: relaxation

Pain, stress, perineal trauma, etc. can cause the pelvic floor to become tense without you noticing. It is therefore important to consciously relax these muscles during everyday life. Lie on your back and place your legs in a butterfly position (with or without support of a pillow). Take 10 deep breaths and with each breath, try to release any tension.

Exercise 4: coordination

In your daily activities, try to contract your pelvic floor muscles before you cough, sneeze, laugh or lift something.

You can start exercising your pelvic floor muscle immediately after giving birth.
It's important to repeat these pelvic floor muscle exercises **every day**, around 60 exercises per day. Incorporate them into your daily routine. Once they become a habit, they will soon feel natural. For example, you can do them while brushing your teeth, watching television, feeding your baby or travelling in the car.

POSTNATAL PHYSIOTHERAPY

During the first few weeks after giving birth, your body needs time to recover. Try to keep lifting and carrying to a minimum. Also reduce the use of your abdominal muscles by always standing up or lying down via your side. Alternate periods of activity with regular periods of rest by lying down briefly.



After six weeks you can start **postnatal** physiotherapy.
This consists of nine individual sessions, during which your pelvic floor muscles are trained alongside your abdominal and back muscles as well as your glutes through a programme of new and progressive exercises. You can also gradually resume sporting activities from this point onwards.

It's important to attend these postnatal sessions with a specialised physiotherapist.

www.bicap.be

Good luck!

The pelvic floor team

ANY QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact one of our physiotherapists on
016 33 87 99 (secretariat).

GENERAL POINTS TO REMEMBER

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