

# After your operation

helping you to recover

The Royal Women's Hospital Fact Sheet / [www.thewomens.org.au](http://www.thewomens.org.au)



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*After an operation, bed rest and inactivity can increase your risk of chest infection and blood clots in your legs. These can be avoided if you follow the instructions below.*

## Immediately after your operation

**To reduce risks of complications, it is important that you:**

**Take big deep breaths**

**Move your feet and legs**

**Get moving as soon as possible.**

### Take big deep breaths

- Once you are awake, take five big deep breaths and hold them in for three seconds.
- Repeat this every hour.
- If you feel something in your throat or you feel a bit chesty, firmly support your tummy with your hands or a pillow and do a strong outward huff. If the huff doesn't help, try a gentle cough.

### Move your feet and legs

- Move your feet backwards and forwards and in circles.
- Repeat this at least 20 times every hour.

### Getting moving as soon as possible

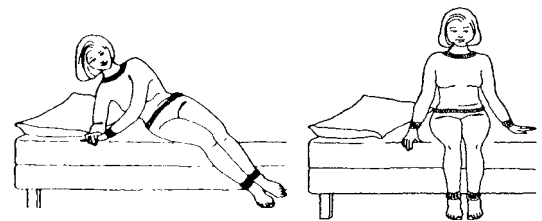
- The most effective way to help your recovery and avoid complications is by sitting out of bed and walking starting on the day after your operation.
- The day after your surgery, you should aim to sit out of bed twice and walk about 10 metres with your nurse.
- Each day after you will be able to sit out of bed for longer and walk further and further.
- Pain from your wound can make moving difficult. Make sure that you let your nurse know how your pain is going so your pain can be managed to allow you to get moving.

## Getting in and out of bed

- The most comfortable way to get in and out of bed is to log roll. You do this by:
  - bending both your knees and rolling onto your side, keeping your shoulders in line with your hips as you roll



- slide your feet over the side of the bed and push yourself up using both of your hands



- to get back into bed do the same thing in reverse.

If you feel discomfort due to abdominal wind or bloating, gently arch and flatten your back against the bed as comfort allows.



## At Home

To further maximise your recovery, it is important that you:

- take care of yourself during the first six weeks after your operation
- maintain healthy bladder and bowel habits
- commence pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscle exercises.

### Take care of yourself

- Make sure you have good posture. Don't bend over when you are walking around. Stand tall, tuck your bottom in and keep your shoulders back.
- Avoid lifting, pushing and pulling tasks and:
  - limit all activities that require any effort or exertion
  - only do light household duties
  - tighten your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles before doing anything that requires even minimal effort
  - always lift correctly – tuck your tummy in, bend at your knees and keep your back straight.
- Rest (lying down) for at least half an hour (30 minutes) each day.
- Walk every day.
  - Start gently and gradually increase your walking speed and distance each day.
  - Incorporate a 30 minute walk into your permanent lifestyle to improve your general health and well-being.
  - Avoid other strenuous and high impact exercises during this time (such as weights, sit-ups, running etc).
- Avoid driving.
  - You are not allowed to drive for the first few weeks after your operation for safety reasons. Insurance policies will generally not cover you for six weeks following surgery if you are involved in an accident.
  - Check with your doctor to find out when you can return to driving.
- Avoid smoking.

### Maintain healthy bladder and bowel habits

#### Healthy bladder habits

- Drink between one and a half and two litres of fluid a day.
  - Water is preferable to tea and coffee.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine or alcohol.
- Avoid just-in-case visits to the toilet; go only when you need to go.
- Avoid straining to pass urine and allow your bladder to fully empty.

#### Healthy bowel habits

- Avoid constipation and straining.
  - Eat plenty of high fibre foods (eg. fruit, vegetables).
  - Drink one and a half to two litres of fluid (preferably water) a day.
  - Get plenty of exercise.

- On the toilet, sit leaning forward and allow your tummy to bulge and relax.
- Use a foot stool or lift your heels off the floor so that your knees are above your hips.
- Don't hold your breath or strain.



- Don't ignore the urge to use your bowels.
- Take your time when emptying your bowels.

### Pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscle exercises

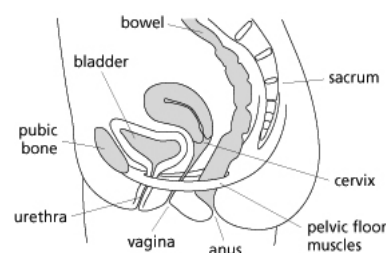
- Pelvic floor and abdominal muscle exercises can be started the day after your operation.
- Do each of the following exercises at least three times a day.
- An exercise diary can help you keep track of your exercises and may keep you motivated.

### Pelvic floor exercises

#### Strong pelvic floor muscles:

- Prevent leakage from your bladder or bowel by keeping the urethra and anus tightly closed.
- Support pelvic organs when there is downward pressure, during coughing, sneezing, lifting, pushing, pulling activities.

All women should exercise their pelvic floor muscles every day. This is especially important after pelvic surgery.



### How to do pelvic floor exercises

- Lie on your back or sit tall in a chair so you can feel the seat beneath your pelvic floor.
- Keep your abdominal, buttock and thigh muscles relaxed and continue to breathe normally.

#### Exercise 1

- 'SQUEEZE & LIFT' your pelvic floor muscles around your urethra, vagina & anus.
  - Hold for as long as you can building up to 8-10 seconds. Repeat 10 times or until the muscle is tired.
  - Repeat this at least 3 times each day.

#### Exercise 2

- Quickly and strongly 'SQUEEZE & LIFT' your pelvic floor muscles. Hold for 1 second then relax.
  - Repeat up to 20 times or until the muscle is tired.
  - Repeat this at least 3 times each day.

As your pelvic floor muscles get stronger, make these exercises more challenging by performing them standing, and then during activities such as lifting and walking.

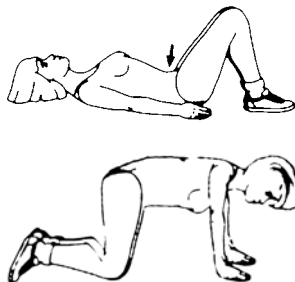
**Remember:** Brace your pelvic floor muscles whenever you need to cough, sneeze, laugh or perform effortful tasks to provide extra support during these occasions.

### Deep abdominal muscle exercise

Strong deep abdominal muscles maintain good posture and support your back and pelvis.

Following abdominal surgery, your tummy muscles are weakened and will need to be re-strengthened.

- Lie on your back with knees bent or kneel on your hands and knees.



- Breathe in and out; tighten your deep abdominal muscles by gently pulling your lower tummy in toward your spine.
- Continue breathing normally while keeping your lower tummy tight.
- Keep your upper abdominal muscles and ribs relaxed.
- Hold for 3-5 seconds, as you improve hold for up to 60 seconds.
- Repeat this up to 10 times in a row.
- Repeat this at least 3 times each day.
- Once you get the hang of it, this exercise can be done while standing and walking.

**Remember:** Tighten your deep abdominal muscles during all effortful tasks such as lifting to provide extra support.

These exercises are important, make them a part of your daily routine to keep your abdominal muscles strong and supportive for the rest of your life.

It is important that you maintain an active lifestyle after your recovery from your operation as physical activity improves your general health and wellbeing.

#### See also

The exercise diary

#### Further information

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