

Stoma Surgery Preparation and Recovery – Core and Abdominal Exercises

Physiotherapy

Patient Information



Introduction

On behalf of the physiotherapy team at the Royal Marsden, we hope you find this information helpful to support your recovery after stoma formation surgery.

If you have any questions or would like to make an appointment to see one of the physiotherapy team you can reach us using the contact details at the end of this leaflet.

Me+Recovery

In addition to this leaflet, please sign up to the Me+ Programme which is run by one of the stoma companies called ConvaTec. It is completely free, and you can request the Me+Recovery programme that guides you through exercises, advice and support to help you get back to activities and exercise.

You can sign up for the programme using this link:

www.convatec.com/en-gb/stoma-care/forms/enroll-in-meplus-consumer-eu/

Or your stoma nurse or physiotherapist can do so on your behalf if that is easier.



Preparing for surgery

If you have some time before your surgery, we recommend beginning the Foundation Exercises below so that you are familiar with them before you come into hospital. Your physiotherapist will check your technique during your hospital stay. Being active in the days and weeks leading up to your surgery will also help and we can provide more advice on that if required so do get in touch on the number at the end of this booklet.

Recovery from surgery

With support from nurses and your physiotherapist you will be encouraged to get out of bed and start walking around straight after your surgery. This is because the earlier you start moving the lower your risk of developing some of the possible complications of surgery such as blood clots and chest infections. It will also help your stoma to begin working.

It is important to learn how to get out of bed safely without straining your tummy muscles in the first few weeks, take a look at the suggested technique in the Me+Recovery booklet or ask your nurse or physiotherapist.

As you get more confident moving around in hospital try to increase the distance you are walking each day. You can re-start the Foundation Exercises straight away, but you might want to start with fewer repetitions initially.

Is exercise and movement safe for me?

Exercising after stoma surgery is generally very safe, but your physiotherapist will explain certain precautions to support your tummy muscles and reduce the risk of developing a hernia (a bulge in the abdominal wall around your stoma site). Strengthening your tummy muscles with exercises and making sure your tummy muscles are ‘active’ before doing strenuous activities is a key part of this.

What do the exercises involve?

The exercises below outline the first of a two-step program for people following abdominal surgery involving formation of a stoma.

The ‘Foundation Exercises’ focus on gentle core and mobility exercises to rebuild strength and confidence. ‘Making Progress’ introduces more challenging exercises to continue improving core strength, flexibility, and balance. You can find these progressions in the full Me+Recovery pack available from Convatec.

We suggest you progress at your own pace, but it is advisable to spend at least 2–3 weeks at the Foundation level after your surgery before progressing to ‘Making Progress’.

We hope this information is helpful and allows you to recover well and return to activities and exercise which are important to you.

Do get in touch if you would like additional support and we can arrange a telephone or face to face appointment. Contact details are at the end of this booklet.

Step 1: Foundation

Aim for 6–12 repetitions. Once you can comfortably and consistently do 12 repetitions you may wish to repeat the exercise doing 2 sets, or you may feel ready to progress on to the ‘Making progress’ exercise which are more challenging and available in the Me+ Recovery booklet or online.

1. Core connect



This ‘core connect’ is a crucial exercise to master because it will ensure you can activate your deep tummy muscles to support around your stoma site. Practice it first in the laying position and then try sitting and standing. Once you can activate these muscles with ease, keeping your breathing relaxed, you will be able to use these tummy muscles to help you in the early days after your surgery before doing anything more strenuous such as getting out of bed or lifting the kettle.

1. Lie down on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
2. Place a hand on your lower tummy.
3. Take a breath in and as you breathe out tighten your lower tummy muscles (below your belly button) – focusing on pulling your tummy away from your hand. You’re aiming to feel this quite deeply so there won’t be much to see – it is quite a gentle movement.
4. Try to hold this gentle contraction whilst you breathe normally for a count of 5.

2. Pelvic tilt



1. Lie on your back with your knees bent.
2. Complete your core connect tummy tighten (as per above).
3. On your next out breath, gently flatten your back into the floor or bed – imagine you are squashing a pea that's rolled under your back's natural curve – this will tilt your hips backwards.
4. Hold this position for a few relaxed breaths – try to keep your core connect throughout.
5. Then relax back to your neutral starting position.

3. Knee rolling



1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet together on the floor.
2. Place your arms out to the side for stability and remember your core connect tighten.
3. Slowly lower your legs to one side, keeping your knees and ankles stacked one on top of the other.
4. Once you have gone as far as comfortable, use your tummy muscles to return your knees to the middle and repeat on the other side.

4. Seated arm raises



1. Sit nice and tall in a chair and remember your core connect.
2. Float your arms above your head as high as you can whilst trying to maintain a neutral position with your spine, ie not arching or bending.
3. Bring them back down to a resting position with control.

5. Seated knee lifts



1. Start by sitting upright in a chair without leaning on the backrest.
2. Contract your core tummy muscles.
3. Slowly raise your right leg up, just a few inches, then return to the start position – the aim is not to lift the leg high but to keep the tummy muscles contracted and an upright posture.
4. Repeat on the opposite leg and continue alternating, slowly and with control.

6. Supported sit-to-stand



1. Sit on a chair that has been placed against the wall to prevent slipping. Place your feet shoulder distance apart, keeping your heels in contact with the floor.
2. Activate your tummy muscles with your 'core connect'.
3. Breathe in, then as your breath out, lean forward from the hips while keeping your chest raised. As you continue to lean forward, press through your heels until you start to rise to a standing position – try and do this without using your arms if possible.
4. Once in a standing position, take a breath then with control slowly lower down towards the chair.

Contact details

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to ask your physiotherapist or clinical nurse specialist.

Physiotherapy contact details

Chelsea 020 7808 2821 (answerphone)

Sutton 020 8661 3098 (answerphone)

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Hotline: 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

Notes and questions

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083

Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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