

Exercises for your abdominal (tummy) muscles and lower back

Physiotherapy is an important part of your recovery after your operation. This factsheet contains information and advice about exercises for your abdominal (tummy) muscles and lower back. Your abdominal muscles support your trunk and back like a corset. They allow movement and help to support your internal organs.

During your operation, some of your abdominal muscles may be cut. Your abdomen will therefore be weaker than normal and less able to support your back.

The following are gentle exercises which will help your abdominal muscles recover and regain their strength. It is safe to start these exercises during the first few days after your operation - they should not be painful. However, you may feel stiff and sore, so it may be better to do them after you have had some painkillers. While you are exercising, continue to breathe normally and do not hold your breath.

Abdominal bracing

- Lie on your back or side or sit upright in a chair and place one or both hands below the level of your tummy button
- Breathe in through your nose and as you breathe out, draw in your lower tummy gently away from your hands towards your back
- Relax and repeat five times.

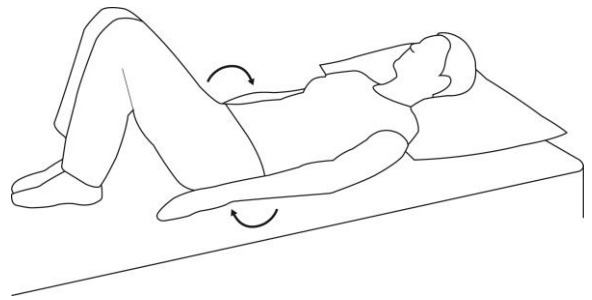


As this exercise becomes easier, keep your tummy muscles drawn in for three to four seconds whilst you continue to breathe in and out normally. When you can do this exercise easily, try to do it when you are standing and moving around, in particular, before and during lifting or bending.



Pelvic tilting

- From the first few days after your operation, lie on your back on the bed, knees bent and shoulder width apart
- Gently tighten your abdominal muscles, flatten your lower back into the bed and hold for one to two seconds whilst breathing normally, then release gently
- Repeat 10 times.



Knee rolling

- Lie on your back on the bed with your knees bent and together, arms by your side and feet on the bed
- Gently tighten your abdominal muscles as described above
- Slowly lower both knees to the right as far as is comfortable
- Bring them back to the middle and repeat to the left side.



To start after four weeks:

Knee bends

- Lie on your back on the bed, knees bent and shoulder width apart
- Keep your arms relaxed by your sides and draw in your lower abdominal muscles as described above, keeping the abdominal muscles drawn in and your hips level
- Lift one foot slowly off the bed and hold for 10 seconds
- Lower the leg so that the foot is back on the bed
- Repeat five times with each leg.



These exercises can also help relieve wind and ease backache. Continue to breathe in and out normally during the exercises. Your physiotherapist will explain how often to do these exercises and how to progress them as you start to recover and become stronger.



Contact details

If you have any questions about the content of this factsheet, please contact The Physiotherapy department.

Chelsea: 0207 808 2821 (answerphone)
Sutton: 0208 661 3098 (answerphone)

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Sources of information and support

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
Tel: 020 7306 6666
Website: www.csp.org.uk

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy can provide information on NHS and private physiotherapists with a special interest in cancer care. They also produce public information leaflets.

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Website: www.acpwh.org.uk

