



Bell Rogers & Harris

SPORT & ORTHOPAEDIC PHYSIOTHERAPY

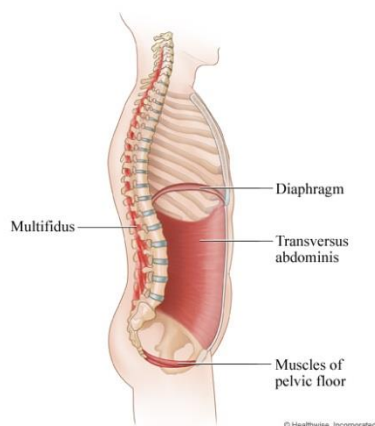
New Motherhood and beyond.....

The “New Beginnings” as a Mother can be rather overwhelming. Naturally all the focus is placed on that new bundle of joy that takes up all your time, but we mustn't forget that the pregnancy and birthing process put a fair amount of stress on the body. It is important to understand that although all these processes are natural, they do take time to recover from and we would like to share a few tips to help you get your body back to the way it was before!



The muscles under most strain during pregnancy are obviously the abdominals. They need to increase in length and width up to 50% to accommodate your growing baby. The middle area between the Rectus Abdominus muscles becomes thinner and a gap may develop along its length. This is referred to as a Diastasis. The Abdominal muscles provide the stability for your pelvis and lumbar spine, so as they become stretched this support is reduced. This, together with the effects of the hormone Relaxin, which helps to soften the pelvic ligaments to assist with the birthing process, can result in low back pain and a poor posture.

Equally strained and important are the muscles of the Pelvic Floor which support the growing baby's weight from underneath. These muscles attach in the front to the pubic bone and to the base of your spine (coccyx) at the back. Besides supporting the uterus they also support the bowel and bladder. Weakness in these muscles can result in urinary incontinence – the leaking of urine while coughing, sneezing, laughing and exercising.



The abdominal muscles (more specifically the **Transversus abdominis** muscle) and the **pelvic floor** make up the anterior and lower parts of the muscular “inner core”. The spine with its supporting **Multifidus** muscle is the posterior part and the **Diaphragm** forms the “roof” of the canister. It is therefore of utmost importance to restore the integrity of this support for the abdominal and pelvic organs, to prevent further pain and problems. This is true if you have had a natural delivery or Cesaerian section. It's not all gloom & doom however!! The body has a wonderful healing capacity and your friendly Physiotherapist can certainly assist you with the process!

Exercising the Pelvic Floor (Kegel Exercises)

In order to start exercising the pelvic floor you need to identify how they are working by doing the Bathroom Test. This involves trying to stop the flow of urine midstream when going to the toilet. You should be able to stop the flow completely if your muscles are functioning well. Please note that this test is only for identifying and checking the muscle strength and should not be done repeatedly as it can lead to urine retention and bladder infections.

Once you have identified the pelvic floor muscles you are ready to exercise them:

1. Begin by emptying your bladder.
2. Tighten the pelvic floor muscles and build up to holding for a count of 10. This may be difficult immediately after giving birth but persevere.
3. Relax the muscles completely for a count of 10.
4. Do 10 repetitions, 6 times a day.
5. Once you have mastered this you can try a few faster contractions and hold for 2 seconds then relax
6. Repeat 10 times

You can do these exercises at any time and any place. Most people prefer to do the exercises while lying down initially but once mastered they can be done anywhere - sitting in a chair, while driving or standing in a queue!

Exercising the abdominals

Fortunately the pelvic floor and transverse abdominal muscles are closely wired together and you will often naturally feel your lower tummy tighten when you contract the pelvic floor. Follow this sequence to initiate getting the abdominals to start working again:

1. Lie comfortably on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor
2. Gently contract your pelvic floor, as discussed above, and then draw your belly button towards your spine.
3. Hold this contraction for 5 – 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times
4. Avoid holding your breath and tightening your upper abdominals
5. As you master this feeling it is important to contract these muscles when picking up your baby or any load.
6. Once you can hold this contraction comfortably for 10 seconds for 10 repeats you may add small amplitude head and shoulder curl ups. Build up to 10 repeats at a time.
7. Ensure that the pelvic floor and transverse abdominal contractions are maintained throughout. Only start this if the Diastasis is less than 2 fingers wide.

There is no recipe timeframe as to when these exercises will be achieved as this is dependent on your prenatal fitness levels, the birth process and individual healing rates, however starting these basic gentle exercises as early as possible (from Day 2 post birth) has been shown to have a multitude of beneficial effects as discussed above.

For further progression of these exercises or if you encounter any difficulties your Physiotherapist should be your first port of call.

Good luck and most of all – **Enjoy your Baby!**

