

Antenatal Exercises

Safety

In pregnancy, short periods of exercising on your back are safe. But, if you have any complications in your pregnancy then please exercise in another position (e.g. lying on your side).

Pelvic Floor Exercises

The pelvic floor muscles are at the bottom of your pelvis and are important for:

- Stabilising the pelvis and spine
- Supporting your pelvic organs
- Supporting of your growing baby

To exercise these muscles, imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind at the same time as trying to stop passing urine. You should feel a squeeze and a lift inside the vagina. Do not hold your breath. Do not clench your buttocks.

If you find this difficult or feel a vaginal bulging when you try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles - get help from a specialist physiotherapist.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises should include long squeezes as well as short, quick squeezes.

Long Squeezes

- Tighten your pelvic floor, hold, and then relax fully. How long can you hold the squeeze?
- Repeat until the muscles tire. How many times can you repeat the squeezes?

Short Squeezes

- Quickly tighten your pelvic floor muscles, then immediately let them go again. How many times can you do this quick squeeze before the muscles tire?
- You may need to start with 'little and often' if you find that you can only hold the squeeze for a short time, or only do a few before the muscles tire
- You should do your pelvic floor muscle exercises at least 3 times a day.
- Build up your exercise routine gradually over the weeks and months. If your muscles were weak, you should notice an improvement in 3-5 months.
- Eventually, aim to do 10 long squeezes, holding each for 10 seconds, followed by 10 short squeezes.

Abdominal Exercise

Your abdominal muscles naturally stretch and weaken as your baby grows. Keeping these muscles strong will provide support for your back, decrease the stress on your pelvic joints, and decrease pain.

Lie on your back propped up on pillows with knees bent, feet on the floor. Ensure your back is neither too curved nor too arched. Lay your hands on your lower belly. Breathe in gently allowing your tummy to rise. As you breathe out, draw in your lower belly towards your spine. Keep your spine and your pelvis still to ensure the movement comes from the abdominal muscles. Keep the muscles contracted for 10 seconds, breathing normally throughout and then relax fully.



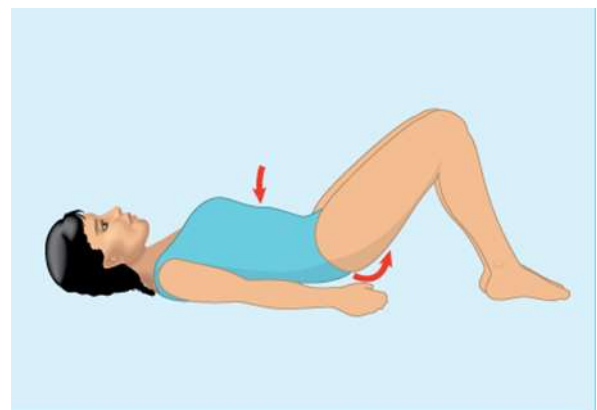
Once you are happy with this exercise, try using this muscle in a variety of positions (e.g. sitting, standing, leaning forward onto a kitchen top, on all fours).

Try using this muscle for support during your day to day activities (e.g. bending, lifting, or standing for long periods). You can increase the length of hold of the abdominal contraction as you strengthen these muscles.

Pelvic Tilt

The pelvic tilt exercise can help maintain abdominal muscle strength, correct posture and ease back pain.

Do a basic abdominal contraction (as described above), drawing up your pelvic floor muscles at the same time, and flatten your lower back into the floor/bed allowing your pelvis to tilt. Breathe normally. Hold the position for 10 seconds and release gently.



Progress this exercise by doing it in different positions (e.g. sitting, standing, lying on your side, kneeling, or on all fours).