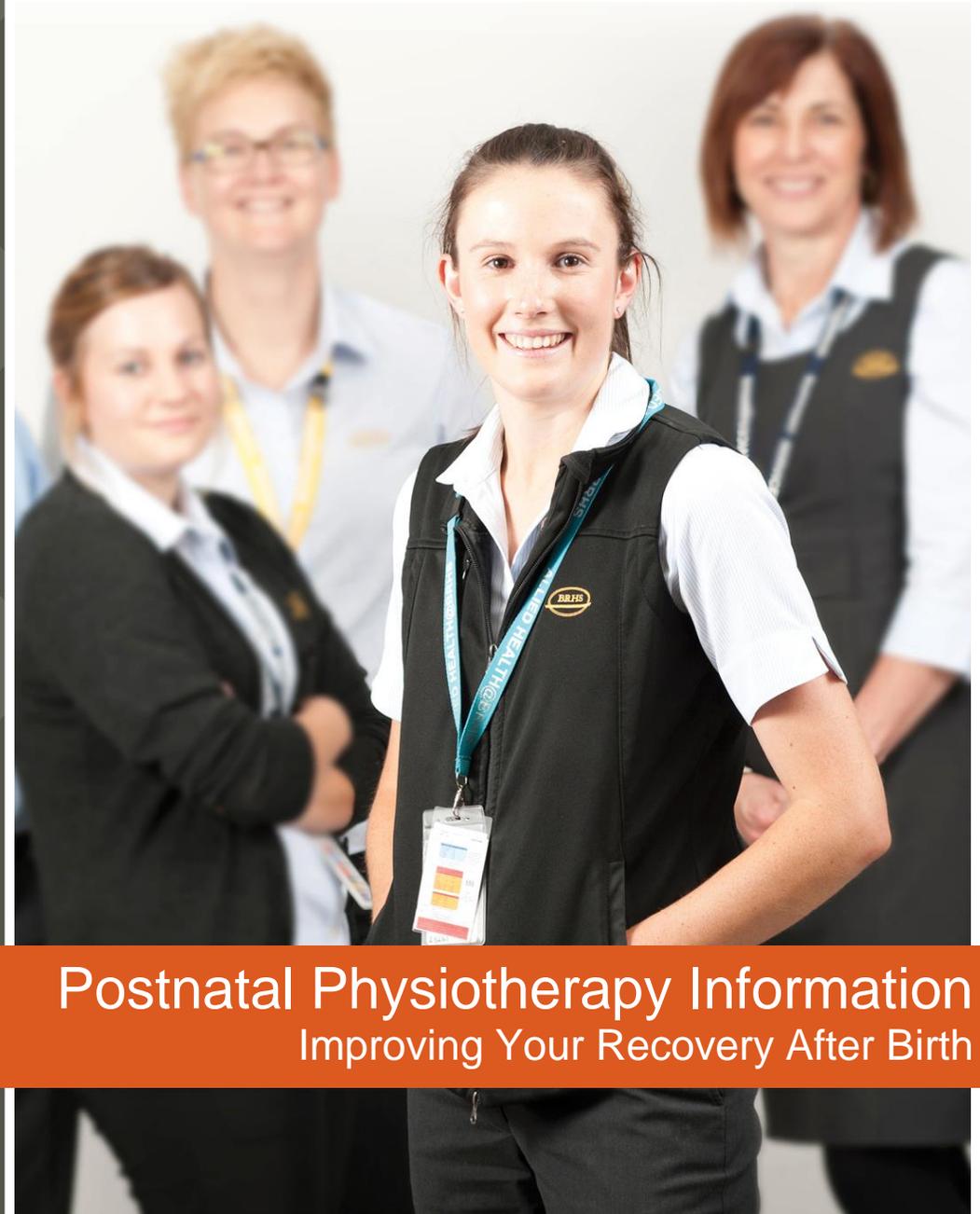


My team *is* **BRHS**



Improving the health and wellbeing of the East Gippsland community by providing accessible, high quality and sustainable health care.

We welcome feedback at:

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P (03) 5150 3333 F (03) 5152 6784 E email@brhs.com.au www.brhs.com.au

Postnatal Physiotherapy Information
Improving Your Recovery After Birth

The information in this brochure is intended as a guide to one of the services provided by BRHS and is correct at the time of publishing.

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Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunai Kurnai people.

Congratulations on the birth of your baby!

Contents

- Page 3:** Immediately after birth
- Page 4:** The Pelvic Floor
- Page 5:** Pelvic Floor Care
- Page 6:** Pelvic Floor Exercises
- Page 7:** Tummy Exercises
- Page 8:** Exercises after a Caesarean
- Page 9:** Caring For Your Back
- Page 10:** Returning to Exercise
- Page 11:** Need Extra Help?

Need Extra Help?

If you are experiencing problems with bladder or bowel control please contact the continence service at Bairnsdale regional Health Service

Regional Continence Service

BRHS Community Health Centre

Ross St. Bairnsdale

8.00am-4.45pm Mon-Fri

Ph: 51520231 for appointments

Please contact the **physiotherapy department** at Bairnsdale Regional Health Service if you need any extra help with back and pelvic pain, abdominal strengthening or any other problems you have developed as a result of birth or pregnancy.

Ph: 51503388

Other helpful contacts:

www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au

www.continence.org.au

Information in this booklet adapted from
-Royal Women's hospital, Australia
-Latrobe regional hospital, Australia
-Continence Foundation, Australia

Returning to Exercise

It is important to remember that no matter how fit you were before your baby, your pelvic floor, tummy and back have been weakened by the pregnancy. Going back to sport or exercise too early can cause problems. Urinary leakage, vaginal heaviness and back pain are not normal after having a baby.

Gentle walking is a great exercise to begin with after birth. It is important to begin gently increasing the distance and pace as your body recovers.

If you are looking at returning to high impact exercises such as running or playing sports like netball, as a general rule wait 3-4 months to let your pelvic floor recover from pregnancy and birth. It is important to complete your pelvic floor exercises during these months to ensure you are ready to return to exercise.

If you experience any leakage of urine or vaginal heaviness during your recovery period, or when increasing your exercise program please contact your doctor, midwife or BRHS continence service.

Immediately After Birth

We recommend that you follow these simple steps to improve your postnatal recovery.

R: Rest: Try to lie flat for 30 minutes, twice a day. This will help to reduce swelling and pain.

I:Ice: Following a vaginal birth, ice helps to reduce pain and swelling around the vagina, particularly in the first 24 hours after delivery. Ice can be placed inside a large pad for 20 minutes every 2-3 hours.

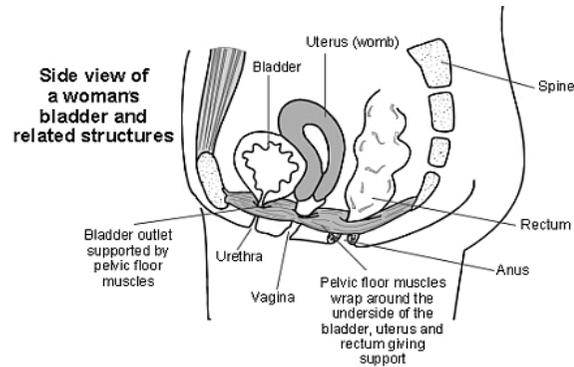
C: Compression: Firm supportive underwear will help support the vagina, pelvic floor and tummy muscles. This will also help to start the healing process. Tummy shaper control briefs can be purchased from K-mart or target and should be worn for the first 6 weeks when you are on your feet. You should buy two sizes larger than you normally wear.

E: Elevation and Exercise: Pelvic floor and tummy muscle exercises help you return to your pre-pregnancy body and assist with healing around any stitches. They can be started 1-2 days after the birth of your baby.

Lying on your stomach with a pillow underneath your hips is a good position to begin pelvic floor exercises and reduce swelling.

The Pelvic Floor

The pelvic floor muscles are a very important group of muscles that support the bladder and bowel and control continence.



Pregnancy hormones, the weight of your baby and childbirth may weaken the pelvic floor. It is important that you exercise these muscles after having a baby to prevent problems now and in the future.

One in three women will have bladder leakage problems after having a baby. All women should know how to exercise their pelvic floor muscles every day.

Please speak to your midwife, physiotherapist or doctor if you have any problems with urine leakage or trouble passing urine.

Caring for Your Back

After pregnancy and childbirth backache is common. Common causes of backache are weak muscles, loose ligaments and joints, poor posture, incorrect lifting technique and bad working positions.

Avoid backache by taking care with daily activities:

- Keep an upright posture when sitting or standing, especially when breastfeeding, changing nappies and bathing your baby.
- Keep your working level at waist height to avoid bending e.g. Change table
- Bend your knees rather than your back
- Try to tighten your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles when you lift, sneeze or cough.



Correct techniques for lifting, changing and breast feeding

Exercises after a Caesarean

While you are resting in bed it is important to do bed exercises to prevent problems developing with your lungs and blood circulation.

Breathing Exercise: To help keep your lungs clear and prevent a chest infection

- ❖ Take 5 slow deep breaths, concentrating on getting air to the base of your lungs.
- ❖ Rest and repeat
- ❖ Repeat every hour you are awake for the first two days following a caesarean birth.

Coughing: To help clear any mucus from your lungs

- ❖ Bend your knees up, sit forward and support your wound firmly with a pillow or your hand.
- ❖ Breathe in and cough out strongly whilst supporting your wound.
- ❖ Repeat every hour you are awake for the first two days following caesarean birth.

Leg exercises: To aid circulation and help prevent blood clots in the legs Move your ankles up and down for one minute

- ❖ Circle your feet at the ankles for one minute
- ❖ Repeat every hour for the first two days following caesarean birth

Getting out of bed:

Bend your knees and roll onto your side. Keep your shoulders and hips inline.

Slide your feet over the side of the bed and push yourself up.



Pelvic Floor Care

It is important to avoid constipation and straining when you are on the toilet. Remember to:

- Drink between 1.5 and 2 litres of water per day (6-8 glasses)
- Eat plenty of high fibre food (e.g. fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods)
- Exercise regularly. Walking is great but not too much too soon.
- Don't ignore urges to use your bladder and bowel.
- Avoid straining and take your time to empty your bladder and bowel to make sure they are completely empty. Support the vaginal area with toilet paper and your hand when emptying your bowel.

To avoid straining:

- When passing a bowel motion, do not strain or push down.
- Only go to the toilet when you have the urge. Let it happen naturally.
- Go to the toilet only when your bladder feels full. Going to the toilet "just in case" will train your bladder into bad habits.

Toilet position

- Sit leaning forward with your elbows on your knees, allow your tummy to relax. Place your legs slightly apart.
- Use a foot stool or lift your heels up off the floor so that your knees are above your hips.
- Sigh out deeply or make a hissing sound.
- Don't hold your breath.
- Support your stitches with your hand and toilet paper particularly when opening your bowels.



Pelvic Floor Exercises

Begin by lying on your back with your knees bent or lying on your tummy, these are generally the easiest positions to begin pelvic floor exercises.

Exercise 1: Long holds

Close around your back passage and vagina, like you are trying to stop yourself passing wind or urine. It is hard to feel these muscles but try to 'lift' these muscles up inside.

Hold the squeeze for around 2-3 seconds, whilst keeping your buttock and thigh muscles relaxed.

Relax for 5 seconds, then repeat this exercise 3 to 5 more times.

Repeat the exercise 4 times per day.

As your pelvic floor muscles get stronger, make the exercise more challenging by increasing the number of exercises and the hold time of each exercise. By the time your baby is 6 weeks old you should be able to tighten and hold your pelvic floor muscles strongly for 6 seconds and repeat

Tummy Exercises

Your tummy muscles are important for normal posture and help support your back. During your pregnancy these muscles are stretched. Strengthening these muscles after birth will help to prevent back pain.

Exercise 1 Abdominal Bracing

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet supported. Rest your hands on your lower tummy.

Breathe in, then breathe out. As you breathe out gently tighten your abdominal muscles under your hand pulling your belly button down toward your spine.

Try to keep your upper abdominal muscles relaxed throughout the exercise.

Hold for 3-5 seconds whilst breathing normally.

Repeat 6-10 times 3 times per day.



Exercise 2 Pelvic Tilts

To begin start in the position as described above.

Tighten your lower tummy muscles and flatten your lower back onto the bed/floor by gently rolling the tail bone and tilting the pelvis towards your ribs. Repeat this exercise as you find comfortable.

