

Self-check: are you ready?

1. CURL UP TEST

Lie on your back with your knees bent. Slowly lift your head and shoulders up off the floor keeping your chin tucked in.

2. LEG LIFT TEST

Lie on your back with your legs straight. Lift one leg up off the ground about 2 inches.

During each test, check for the following:

- Do you have back or pubic pain with these tests?
- Try to feel the borders of the (rectus abdominus) muscles along the middle of your tummy. Is there a 'soft' gap or separation of these muscles? (see photo)
- Do you see any bulging or doming of your abdomen? (see photo)
- Feel your pelvic floor (at the opening of your vagina). Is there descent or bulging out?

If any of the above occurs, see a physiotherapist for a complete assessment of your abdominal and/or pelvic floor muscles before beginning to exercise.



Self-check for abdominal separation



Doming abdomen

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR PHYSIOTHERAPIST?

Your physiotherapist will:

- provide a detailed assessment, which may include an internal exam and/or ultrasound imaging;
- explain to you their findings;
- work with you to develop a treatment program (manual therapy, education and exercise) that is specific to your needs.

Your physiotherapist will advise you when you are ready to take on more activity and help you to work towards whatever exercise/community program that fits your needs and goals.

WANT MORE?

Find a physiotherapist or clinic that focuses in postpartum health:

- 1) Online: Physiotherapy Association of BC
www.bcphysio.org
 - ▶ Click on the **Find a Physio** link
 - ▶ Select an area of expertise in your city:
 - Perinatal Care
 - Incontinence
 - Vaginal/Rectal Pain
 - Women's Health
 - Constipation
- 2) Check with your local physiotherapy clinic and their websites for services offered specifically for postpartum health.

COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Check your local leisure or recreational guide for education and exercise classes and be sure to check the credentials of the instructor to ensure they have the expertise you need. Your physiotherapist will be a good resource for postpartum programs in your community.

This brochure was produced by PABC in collaboration with the physiotherapists at Diane Lee & Associates (www.dianelee.ca), BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre (www.bcwomens.ca) and Dayan Physiotherapy (www.dayanphysio.com) after consultation with PABC members, and pioneered by Rachael Corbett.



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Your Body after Baby

Postpartum health



Things to consider after having your baby

What's normal and what's not? How do you know if you need help?

Now you are postpartum. This brochure explains what to expect from your body after giving birth and what to do if things don't go as expected. If you had a vaginal or a caesarean birth, your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles have been stretched and possibly damaged and it is essential to get them working well again. While your goal may be to lose your baby fat and restore your figure, how you do this is important since some kinds of exercise can create back pain, difficulty controlling urine or stool or dropping of the uterus and other pelvic organs. Knowing when and how to begin is important.



Good standing posture



Poor standing posture

Your body will heal on it's own, and by knowing what is normal, and what is not, you can determine if you are at risk for further problems and if you need some help. A physiotherapist can help guide you through this very important time of your life.

“Jumping right into an exercise program after delivery isn't ideal for everyone.”

1

What is Normal?

0-8 WEEKS AFTER DELIVERY

- You may feel like your bottom is falling out and not know how you should be standing or sitting.
- You may experience pain in your back, hips or pubic area.
- You may have difficulty controlling urine, gas or stool.
- Your neck, arms, back and hips may be sore as you adjust to lifting and feeding your baby.

This is an important stage of healing, allow yourself time to adjust and take the time to listen to your body!

WHAT TO DO AS YOU HEAL

- Try not to slouch when sitting, standing, nursing or carrying your baby. Use pillows to support your back and baby. It is important to develop good postural habits now, as good habits can prevent future problems (see photos left).
- Begin to gently contract your pelvic floor muscles and deep abdominal muscles. Your pain should not increase when you use these muscles gently. Slowly increase the number of contractions and start by holding each one for up to 5 seconds (10 seconds is your goal). See your physiotherapist to ensure you are doing these correctly.
- Stretch your back, buttocks and shoulders to help relieve soreness.
- Rest is just as important as exercise at this stage so allow yourself time to adjust and take time to listen to your body!

8+ WEEKS AFTER DELIVERY

- Your bleeding should have stopped and any incisions/tears should have healed; consult your doctor if you have concerns.
- You should be pain free.
- You should have control over your bladder and bowel movements.
- You may now begin to increase your activity level and consider returning to your exercise class/practice but before you do, go through the following checklist of 'not normal' findings to ensure you are ready.

2

What is Not Normal?

a symptom checklist

- Ongoing back, pelvis, groin or abdominal pain
- Leaking urine, gas or stool with laughing, coughing, jumping, sneezing, lifting, walking, running, etc.
- Leaking urine or stool when you feel a strong urge to go
- Pressure or bulging in your vagina or rectum
- Bulging of your abdomen during ANY exercise. See the details in this brochure on two tests to learn how to check for this.
- Difficulty doing any of your everyday activities because of pain, leakage, pressure or any other symptom that concerns you



Non-bulging abdomen



Bulging abdomen

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A SYMPTOM

None of the above symptoms are normal at this stage. If you checked one or more, you should:

- ✓ Get some advice and help from a physiotherapist. These symptoms do not usually go away on their own.
- ✓ In the meantime, do not do sit-ups or any other form of core strengthening. Your core muscles (deep abdominals and pelvic floor) likely need to be trained before they can be strengthened. There is a difference, and your physiotherapist will explain this to you.

3