



York Teaching Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Taking care of yourself in pregnancy

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Women's Health Physiotherapy Department

The York Hospital

Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

Tel: 01904 725389

Or

Women's Health Physiotherapy Department

Scarborough Hospital

Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL

Tel: 01723 385023

Caring with pride

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
General exercise .....	3
Abdominal exercises .....	4
Exercising your support muscles.....	5
Pelvic tilting.....	7
Posture.....	8
Back care .....	9
Comfort .....	10
Pelvic floor exercises.....	11
Common minor problems .....	12
Useful links and safety note.....	13

## General exercise

Exercising at a moderate level during pregnancy helps to maintain your levels of fitness and makes you feel good. It can help to keep your weight within a healthy range, improve your posture, balance and coordination, increase your stamina and help your body to prepare for labour and delivery.

Always listen to your body and take notice of it, stop if you feel uncomfortable, too hot, tired, short of breath or unwell.

## Top Tips

- Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration
- Treat new types of exercise with caution
- Avoid contact sports
- Avoid high impact activity
- Be cautious in the gym

## Useful types of exercise for you are:

- Walking
- Swimming (avoid the kicking action of breast stroke if you have pelvic pain)
- Modified Pilates
- Pregnancy Yoga

## Abdominal exercises

The abdominal muscles form a natural corset supporting your back and internal organs.

In pregnancy:

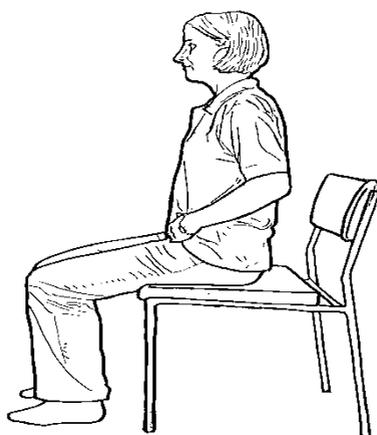
- Your stomach muscles stretch and become weakened in pregnancy.
- Weight gain tends to make you feel off balance, which can lead to poor posture.
- Hormonal changes can make your ligament supports more elastic and therefore the pelvic joints become less stable.

**Working** your abdominal muscles helps to stabilise your pelvis, maintain a correct posture and reduce pelvic pain.

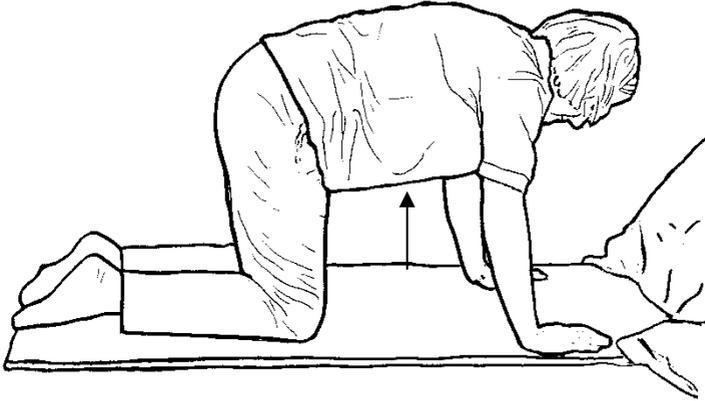
## Exercising your support muscles

The deep support muscles can be felt at the front of the pelvis.

- Sit with your feet flat on the floor and your back well supported.
- Place your hands below the level of your tummy button
- Breathe in, as you breathe out draw the lower abdomen gently away from your hands towards your back.  
It may help to imagine this as a zipping action.
- Hold for a few seconds while you carry on breathing.
- Repeat several times, gradually holding for longer.  
Aim for 10 seconds.



Try using this zipping action in other positions such as standing, lying on your side, or on your hands and knees.



Start using the support muscles during different activities:

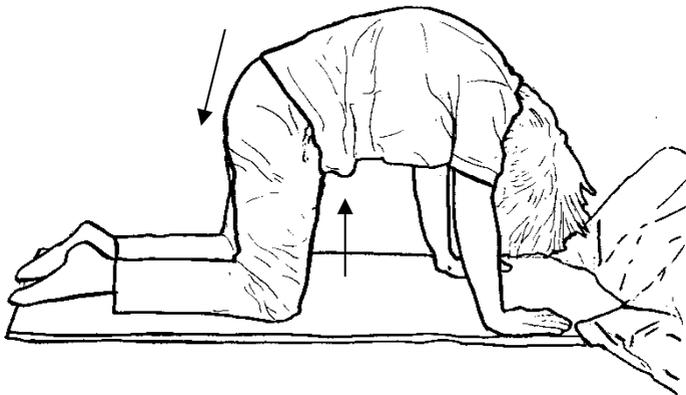
- When moving from a sitting to a standing position
- Walking
- Going up and down stairs
- Lifting your arms above your head when reaching up to a shelf
- Reaching forwards into the boot of a car

Always engage the core muscles when lifting.

## Pelvic tilting

Try this exercise on your hands and knees

- First draw in your support muscles using your zipping action
- Tuck your bottom in tilting your pelvis forwards
- Gently arch your lower back, continuing up into your upper back and as you do so look through your knees
- Relax your shoulders and back and finally your support muscles



Pelvic Tilt

Try this exercise when lying on your side or in standing

# Posture

## 1. Standing

- Aim to stand tall, with your tummy and bottom tucked in and your weight evenly distributed through both legs.
- Do not overarch your back.
- Do not take weight through one hip.

## 2. Sitting

- Always have your back well supported, place a small pillow or rolled up towel in the natural curve of your spine.
- Try sitting on a folded pillow or wedge to maintain a good posture and give more room for your bump.
- Do not sit with your feet tucked to one side.
- Sitting on a gym ball may be a comfortable alternative.

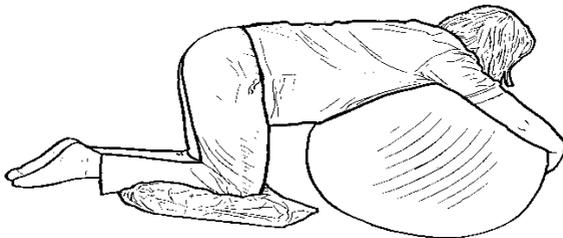
## Back care

1. Avoid lifting heavy or awkward objects. If lifting, bend your knees and keep the object close to you.
2. Be careful of awkward movements such as reaching, twisting, hoovering or pushing a shopping trolley.
3. Avoid standing on one leg when getting dressed – sit down.
4. When getting up from a lying position, bend your knees and roll onto one side.
5. If turning over is uncomfortable, move from side lying to a sitting position over the side of the bed, then transfer pillows to the bottom of the bed and lower onto your side.

## Comfort

Balance all activity with rest.

1. When lying on your side place a pillow or duvet under your bump and or between your knees as comfortable.
2. Try a variety of leaning forward positions
  - Cowboy style, sitting astride a chair. Do not attempt this if you have groin or pubic pain.
  - Kneel on the seat of an armchair and lean over the back.
  - Stand and lean onto a stable surface for example kitchen worktop or a chest of drawers.
  - On all fours, change between leaning onto the settee and over a gym ball.



## Pelvic floor exercises

The pelvic floor muscles lie at the base of your pelvis and support your pelvic organs and your baby. A strong pelvic floor will help you to control your bladder and bowel, and may enhance sexual intercourse. Pregnancy followed by delivery may weaken these muscles.

To exercise:

1. First, imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind, and then imagine you are stopping the flow of urine. ‘

squeeze and lift’ the back and front passages

Hold this squeeze for as long as you can  
(up to ten seconds)

Repeat several times (up to ten)

2. To improve support and protection through the day try, whenever you are active, to squeeze and lift a little.
3. Help your quick reactions by squeezing and lifting then letting go immediately. Do this several times and use your quick squeeze reaction when laughing or sneezing to help prevent leakage.

**Remember** Pelvic floor exercises are for life. Link your exercises with an activity for example having a drink, washing up or whilst sitting at the traffic lights.

## Common Minor Problems

### Cramp

- To help prevent cramp and improve the circulation in your legs, circle your ankles briskly for about a minute
- Avoid sitting with your legs crossed
- Avoid wearing high heeled shoes
- Avoid shoes that do not support your feet and your toes have to grip to keep them in place e.g. flop flops or ballet pumps.

### Swollen feet and ankles

- Rest with your legs supported in a raised position
- Regularly exercise by circling your ankles briskly

### Painful wrists and fingers

This problem is due to increased fluid causing nerve pressure at the wrist and is most common at night. Wrist splints supplied via the physiotherapist can help reduce symptoms.

## **USEFUL LINKS**

<http://pogp.csp.org.uk/publications/fit-pregnancy>

<http://pogp.csp.org.uk/publications/pregnancy-related-pelvic-girdle-pain-mothers-be-new-mothers>

## **SAFETY NOTE**

### **Please Note:**

Exercises should be carried out strictly as instructed by your physiotherapist. Should you not carry out these exercises as recommended or not do them as regularly as you have been requested to, you do so at your own risk and the Trust accepts no liability for such misuse.

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Women's Health Physiotherapy, The York Hospital,  
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904  
725389.

## **Teaching, Training and Research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.



Providing care together in York, Scarborough, Bridlington,  
Malton, Selby and Easingwold communities

Please telephone or email if you  
require this information in a different  
language or format

如果你要求本資訊是以不同的語言  
或版式提供，請致電或寫電郵

Jeżeli niniejsze informacje potrzebne  
są w innym języku lub formie,  
należy zadzwonić lub wysłać  
wiadomość e-mail

Bu bilgileri değişik bir lisanda ya da  
formatta istiyorsanız lütfen telefon  
ediniz ya da e-posta gönderiniz



**01904 725566**

email: [access@york.nhs.uk](mailto:access@york.nhs.uk)



Braille



Audio e.g.  
CD



Large print



Electronic

Owner	Women's Health Physiotherapy Team
Date first issued	April 2003
Review Date	September 2019
Version	7 (issued October 2017)
Approved by	Obstetrics and Gynaecology Clinical Governance Group
Document Reference	PIL 187 v7

© 2017 York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. All Rights reserved