

## BACK CARE FOR MOTHERS

Back pain both during and after pregnancy is not uncommon. Your body goes through a lot of changes both physically, emotionally and hormonally. Pregnancy and post pregnancy can exacerbate pre-existing back pain or may give rise to new symptoms around the back and pelvic area.

This leaflet is designed to give some advice on how to manage back pain for new mums. This will include some advice on positions and movement and how to get started with exercise.

If you need help beyond this advice, book in with one of our Specialist Physiotherapists.

You can also visit the Pelvic Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy website for further info: [www.pogp.csp.org.uk](http://www.pogp.csp.org.uk).

### Sleeping

Many women find sleeping in a similar position to pregnancy most comfortable for example inside lying with pillows between the legs and may continue to use a pregnancy pillow.

Another useful posture if you tend to sleep on your back is to place 1-2 pillows under your thighs to relieve load on the lower back.

### Feeding

Many women experience thoracic back pain (pain between the shoulder blades) when caring for their baby. This may be due to adopting flexed postures for periods of time when feeding or lifting/picking up your baby.

Ensuring you are in a good and well supported posture for feeding can help with this. For example sitting fully back into a chair so your back is supported. Also placing pillows under your arms to rest on so you are not having to support the weight of the baby and where possible changing sides between feeds. Some upper back exercises outlined below can also help to relieve pain.

### Exercise

After giving birth your rate of return to exercise will depend on several factors including pre pregnancy fitness level, labour/delivery and pain levels. Other factors such as DRAM (separation of the abdominal muscles) and continence may also have an impact on return to specific types of activity.

Starting with gentle cardiovascular exercise such as walking is usually a good place to start. Getting moving early can help with managing back pain. Remember to pace yourself and you will be starting at a lower level than previously so start with short slow walks and gradually build up.

A general guide would be to start low impact exercises from 6 – 12 weeks and introduce higher impact exercises such as weights and running after 12 weeks but this will depend on the individual and should be used as a guide.

### Lower Back Exercises

Below are some simple exercises you can start straight away to encourage movement in the lower back. These exercises can be done daily and aim for 5-10 reps of each.

#### Pelvic tilt:

- Lying in your back with both knee's bent and feet flat on the floor/bed
- Roll your pelvis up towards you and flatten your back into the floor/bed, you may feel your tummy muscles tighten
- Reverse the movement by rolling the pelvis away and creating a small arch in the lower back
- You can also try this exercise in sitting

#### Pelvic Floor:

These muscles form a sling and support the bladder and reproductive organs.

- Again, in the pelvic neutral position, slowly draw your pelvic floor muscles up and in as if you are trying to control going to the toilet. Do not think about 'stopping' as this works all the muscles too hard.
- Your bottom and thigh muscles must stay relaxed; it should just feel like the sling of muscles underneath you is rising up into your abdomen.
- If you feel any other tightening, then stop and try to re-isolate these muscles. Practise holding these muscles in while you breathe in and out. Hold this for several seconds making sure you are maintaining the contraction throughout and repeat

### Upper Back Exercises

These exercises are more targeted for the upper back and shoulders.

#### Cat stretch:

- Start in four point kneeling with wrists underneath shoulders and knee's underneath hips
- Push your chest down towards the floor and slightly lift the head so you are looking forwards
- Reverse the movement and arch the middle back, between the shoulder blades, up to the ceiling and bring the chin towards the chest

#### Arm opener:

- Start by lying on your side with a pillow between the legs and arm out straight at shoulder height
- Lift the top arm up and across reaching over towards the opposite side until you feel a stretch
- Bring the arm back over and repeat 5 times before changing sides

## Bending and lifting

Lifting and carrying a child, as well as picking up toys from the floor and pushing a buggy are all daily tasks for parents. There are a few things to consider when you are doing these activities:

### Bending

Keep your back straight and use your knees to bend down. If you are picking a few things up off the floor, then kneel down or sit on a low seat. Get your children to join in with this from a young age so that it doesn't always fall on your shoulders

### Carrying

Keep your child close to you and avoid placing them on one hip. This introduces asymmetry and strain to your back. If you are using a baby carrier make sure you keep your back straight and your shoulders back

### Lifting

If your child's cot has rails that can be lowered, then do this before picking up your child up – even if they are screaming! Some cots also have sleeping platforms that can be adjusted. If you have one of these, keep it quite high, so that you don't have to bend as much; until your child can stand. The best technique is then to stand with your feet shoulder width apart, bend slightly at your knees and keeping you back flat, bend forwards at your hips and hug your child close to you. Straighten up from the hips and extend your knees

### Pushing

When pushing a pram or buggy the force should come from your entire body and not just your arms. Keep yourself close to the pram/buggy and again try to keep your back straight and your shoulders back

### Nappies

The changing tables should be set up higher than a normal work surface to prevent you from having to bend excessively. When you change your baby's nappy, avoid bending down close to them because this will inevitably put a strain on your back. If you want to cuddle and kiss them then try to do this afterwards, to show how good they have been (or not!)

## EXAMPLES OF EXERCISE PROGRESSION IN THE POSTNATAL RUNNER

Weeks Postnatal	Examples of Exercise Progression
<b>Weeks 0-2</b>	 Pelvic floor muscle strength & endurance  Basic core exercises e.g. pelvic tilt  Walking for Cardiovascular exercise
<b>Weeks 2-4</b>	 Progress walking, pelvic floor muscle/core rehab  Introduce squats, lunges & bridging in line with day-to-day requirements
<b>Weeks 4-6</b>	 Low impact exercise - static cycling  Low impact - cross trainer Individualise according to postnatal recovery, mode of delivery, perineal trauma & saddle comfort
<b>Weeks 6-8</b>	 Scar mobilisation  Power walking  Increase low impact exercise  Add dead lift  Add resistance to lower limb & core
<b>Weeks 8-12</b>	 Introduce swimming  Dependent if lochia stopped & wound healing satisfactory  Spinning if comfortable sitting on a spinning saddle
<b>Week 12 &amp; Beyond</b>	 Graded return to running  Goal specific  Consider running coach  Consider risk factors e.g. obesity  Modify according to signs & symptoms

Source - Goom T, Donnelly G & Brockwell E. Returning to running postnatal - Guidelines for medical, health and fitness professionals managing this population. March 2019