



Physiotherapy department

## Exercises following abdominal surgery

### Exercises

The following exercises are designed to reduce the risk of complications such as abdominal weakness or low back pain following your surgery. These exercises should not be painful to do. It is important to do them daily as outlined below.

After you leave The Christie it is important to continue the exercises, as they will help to prevent stiffness and pain. You should continue to do these exercises three times a day.

### Day 2 post surgery

#### Pelvic tilting

This exercise helps to prevent/ease back pain by encouraging spinal mobility.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and both feet on the floor/bed.
- Keeping your knees together, gently tighten your tummy muscles so that the hollow in your back is pressed against the floor/bed.



#### Knee rolling

This is an important exercise to keep your trunk mobile.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and both feet on the floor/bed.
- Keeping your knees together, slowly lower both knees to one side and then the other.



**Repeat both exercises 10 times, 3 times a day for 6 weeks.**

**After 4 weeks from the date of your surgery you may add the following exercise:**

#### Abdominal hollowing in 4 point kneeling

This exercise will help to begin to strengthen your tummy muscles.

- Kneel on all fours keeping your back as straight as possible.
- Gently tighten the muscles in the lower part of your tummy without arching your back.
- Hold the position for 5 seconds and relax.
- Repeat this exercise 10 times, 3 times a day.



**After 6 weeks from the date of your surgery you may add the following exercises:**

### **Abdominal curl ups**

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and both feet on the floor/bed.
- Keeping your knees together, place a hand on each thigh.
- Lift your head and shoulders off the floor by sliding your hands along your thighs towards your knees.
- Slowly lower your head and shoulders back to the floor.



### **Abdominal oblique curl ups**

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and both feet on the floor/bed.
- Keeping your knees together, place your right hand on your left thigh.
- Lift your head and right shoulder off the floor by sliding your right hand along your left thigh towards your left knee.
- Slowly lower your head and shoulders back to the floor.
- Repeat this exercise on your other side by sliding your left hand towards your right knee.



### **Bridging**

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and both feet on the floor/bed.
- Keeping your knees together and arms by your side, lift your bottom off the floor as high as you can.
- Hold for a few seconds and then lower yourself onto the floor/bed.



**Repeat each exercise 10 times, 3 times a day.**

It is important to continue all these exercises until you feel you are back to normal, that is, back to work if appropriate, having regained your fitness and range of movement as before, and enjoying sports and activities. This can sometimes take at least 12 weeks.

To further improve your abdominal strength, we recommend "Pilates". You can start this 6 weeks post surgery. You will need to find a beginners class in your local area.

**For any further information or advice contact the physiotherapy department at  
The Christie on 0161 446 3795**



## Physiotherapy department

# Advice following abdominal surgery

### **Advice**

The following information is designed to help you after your discharge from hospital and to guide your return to activity.

### **First few days at home**

For the first couple of days at home you should rest, following the same routine as in The Christie. You may walk around the house, up and downstairs as necessary. You may find you tire easily but do not worry about this. The return to your usual activities takes time and is a gradual process.

### **Walking**

We recommend regular walking as the main exercise to maintain your fitness. Begin by pottering around the house and garden or walking to the local shops. Aim to have a walk daily and gradually progress by increasing the distance and/or the speed of your walk.

### **Good posture**

It is very important to maintain a good posture. If you allow yourself to become stooped when you stand or walk this may encourage back pain to develop. When you are sitting in a chair, try to make sure your back is supported. Avoid a slumped position at all times.

### **Getting into and out of bed**

For the first 6 weeks following your surgery you should get into and out of bed using a 'log rolling' technique. This reduces the stress on your abdominal wound and reduces pain on movement. For example, when getting out of bed keep your knees bent. Roll your body on to your side dropping your legs over the edge of the bed. Push yourself up into the sitting position on the edge of the bed using your hand and arms. Reverse the procedure when getting into bed.

### **Discomfort**

Some discomfort around your wound sites is quite common after surgery. We advise you take your painkillers regularly as prescribed by your doctor for as long as you have pain, so that you are able to breathe deeply, cough, sleep and move more comfortably.

Whilst in The Christie you should sleep with a pillow under your knees. This will help with any discomfort and reduce any stress on your abdominal wound during healing. You no longer need to use the pillow when you go home if you are comfortable without it. You can also lie on your tummy when it is comfortable to do so.

### **Lifting**

Reduce lifting wherever possible in the first 6 weeks following your surgery to allow your body time to heal. As a guide, do not lift more than a full 3 pint kettle of water or its equivalent of 3 to 4 kgs or 6 to 8 lbs. Do not attempt heavy lifting or moving furniture until 12 weeks after surgery.

**Remember:** When you do lift, do it correctly. With your feet apart, bend your knees, keep your back straight and tighten your tummy muscles. Hold the object close to your body and lift by straightening your knees.

## Household tasks and gardening

Remember these are only **guidelines** – you should take things at your own pace and increase activities a little at a time. It is important to concentrate on becoming more active but at the pace your body dictates. If you are unsure consult your doctor.

**First 4 weeks at home.** Start by taking things gently. You may begin light activities in the house such as washing up, dusting and easy household jobs.

**After 4 to 6 weeks.** You may further increase activities to include for example, vacuuming, ironing, cooking, hanging out washing, making beds.

**After 6 weeks.** Provided there are no problems at your outpatient appointment, resume all normal activities within your own limits. You can start light gardening jobs. Hand weeding, planting small plants kneeling on all fours and light hoeing are acceptable.

## Sport and active hobbies

A gradual return to exercise is essential.

**After 4 weeks at home** you can start low impact exercises, for example, use of a cross trainer in a gym, swimming (provided your wound has healed), dancing, hill walking.

**After 6 to 8 weeks at home** more strenuous exercise such as golf, racquet sports, jogging, aerobics, cycling and most other sports can be started. If in doubt, check with your doctor.

## Driving

Do not drive for 4 to 6 weeks following surgery. In the interests of road safety, you must be sure that you can safely control your vehicle at all times, for example, be able to do an emergency stop safely. *However, we do advise that you check with your insurance company if you have an exclusion clause on your policy related to major surgery.* Some insurance companies insist on a 'fitness to drive' report from your GP. Check with your doctor if you are in doubt. You can also contact the DVLA for advice on [www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk) or call 0870 600 0301.

## Wound healing and massage

Firm massage with a simple moisturiser over the scar and skin of the abdomen when your wound has healed is recommended. This may help reduce the risk of tight scar formation and keep the skin supple. Use your fingers on the palm of your hand. Move the top layer of skin on the underlying layers in a circular motion or away from the scar. We suggest using for example Bio Oil or E45.

## Abdominal stretching

Once your wounds have healed, you can begin to gently stretch your abdomen. This may help you regain your normal posture and prevent tight scarring. Progress from lying flat on your back to lying on your tummy and then to lying on your tummy propped up on your elbows.

## Returning to work

Your doctor will advise you when to return to work. It may be any time up to 12 weeks depending on the type of work you do, the amount of travelling involved, the amount of lifting involved and the rate of your recovery.

## Sexual intercourse

This may be resumed as soon as you feel comfortable.

It is important to continue all these exercises until you feel you are back to normal, that is, back to work if appropriate, having regained your fitness and range of movement as before, and enjoying sports and activities. This can sometimes take at least 12 weeks.

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