

Postnatal Progressive Abdominal Strengthening

Physiotherapy Patient Information

Introduction

Once you have established good activation of your core with your breathing and your therapist feels you are ready, you can progress to some more challenging exercises.

Signs to look out for to suggest you are ready to progress:

- You see minimal 'doming'ⁱ with the exercise (if you have a diastasis)ⁱⁱ
- You are not holding your breath
- You are not overusing/gripping with your neck muscles
- During the more difficult exercises, you can control your pelvis without arching your back

1. Pull Downs

- a. Attach a band to the top of a door.

Standing with feet hip width apart, pelvis in neutralⁱⁱⁱ and shoulders set back

Inhale and relax the tummy

Exhale, engage the abdominals and pull the band down

Inhale as you relax and release the band

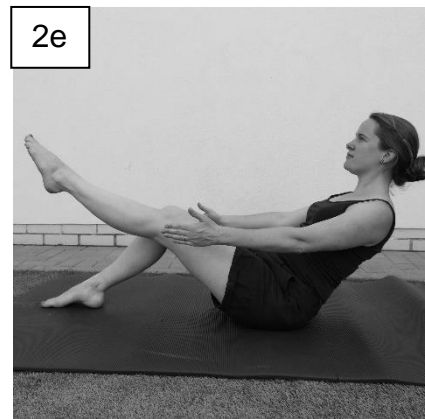
10reps, 3 sets

- b. Progress to standing on one leg. Ensure your pelvis is level and you activate your glute muscles - you should feel your buttocks tightening.



2. Sit up Progression Series

- a. Start with core breath – inhale and release abdominal muscles, exhale and engage – you should feel your lower abdominals tightening slightly.
- b. Seated lean back – Inhale to prepare. Exhale and engage as you lean back. Inhale as you return to start position. Only lean back as far as you are able to control. 5-10 repetitions, 3 sets.
- c. Seated lean back and hold – start with 5 seconds and work up to 20, 5 to 10 sets.
- d. Lean back on the ground, gradually lean back more over time.
- e. Lean back and leg lift – exhale and engage to lift the leg, inhale and relax to lower it. 5-10 reps on each side, 3 sets.



3. Rotation Progression Series

- a. Start with core breath – inhale and release, exhale and engage.
- b. Seated lean back with rotation – Inhale to prepare. Exhale and engage as you lean back rotate. Inhale as you return to start position. Only lean back as far as you are able to control. 5 repetitions on each side, 3 sets.
- c. Lean back with rotation on the ground, gradually lean back more over time.
- d. Leg lift – exhale, engage to lift the leg and rotate the opposite elbow towards it. Inhale and relax to start position. 5 reps on each side, 3 sets.

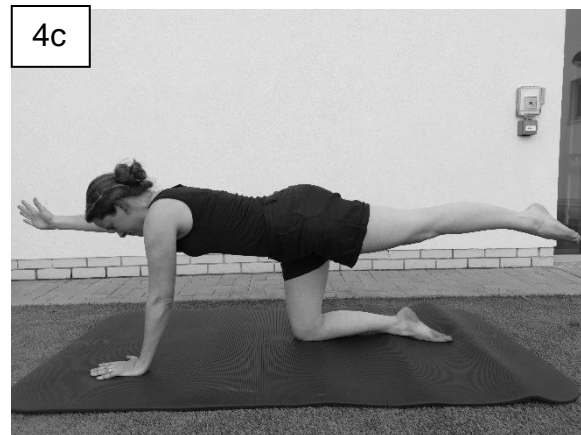




4. Bird Dog Progression Series

Start on all fours, hands under shoulders and knees under hips. Ensure that you maintain a neutral spine throughout.

- a. Exhale and engage as you extend one leg out behind you, keeping your toes on the floor. Maintain the engagement as you breathe and hold 5 seconds 8-10 reps. Repeat on both sides
- b. Exhale and engage as you lift one leg straight out behind you. Maintain the engagement as you breathe and hold 5 seconds 8-10 reps. Repeat on both sides
- c. Exhale and engage as you lift one leg and the opposite arm. Maintain the engagement as you breath and hold 5 seconds 8-10 reps. Repeat on both sides
- d. Push against a wall with the extended arm. Start with a light press and gradually press harder. For even more challenge, press your supporting knee/shin/foot in to the floor. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat on both sides
- e. Use small weights in the extended hand. Repeat on both sides

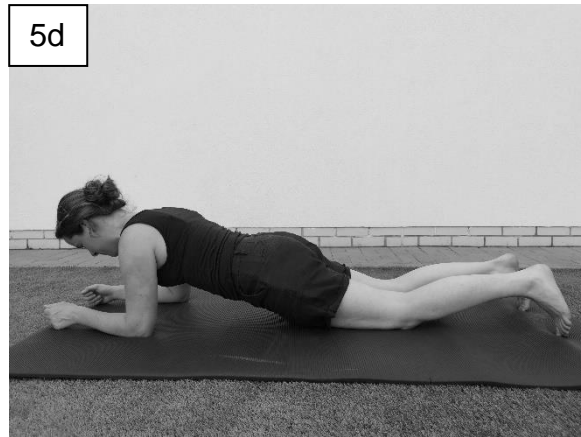


5. Plank Progression Series

- a. Start with core breath in standing – inhale expand, exhale engage and draw in your tummy.
- b. Plank against the wall – arms outstretched with hands against the wall. Feet further back so that you can feel the activation in your tummy. Inhale relax, exhale engage. Then try to hold the engagement while you breathe. Build up gradually to 30 seconds.
- c. Plank on knees with your forearms on a chair. Inhale relax, exhale engage. Then try to hold the engagement while you breathe.
- d. Plank on your knees with your elbows on the floor. You can use a hand held mirror under your tummy to observe any doming. Inhale relax, exhale engage.

Then try to hold the engagement while you breathe. Build up gradually to 30 sec.

- e. Build up gradually to a full plank on your toes and forearms.



Pelvic Floor Exercises

Continuing with your pelvic floor exercises throughout your postnatal strengthening will support the work you are doing and maintain a healthy bladder and bowel habit. (See [RUH Pelvic Floor Exercises](#) leaflet for more information)

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to call Physiotherapy reception on (01225) 821241. They will be able to direct you to your Physiotherapist.

Alternatively, you can email ruh-tr.therapiesoutpatientadmin@nhs.net
To access video links and further support, please visit the Physiotherapy webpage: <https://ruh.nhs.uk/patients/services/physiotherapy/>



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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656 / 826319

Glossary of Terms

- ⁱ 'Doming,' or 'bulging' are terms often used to describe the appearance of the stomach when increased abdominal pressure (through exertion), causes the gap between the two rectus abdominus muscles to push out (or dip in).
- ⁱⁱ Diastasis recti or DRA refers to the separation that occurs between the right and left abdominal muscles during pregnancy. This is a normal part of pregnancy, but if the gap is large or more persistent, you will need to consult your Physiotherapist for advice on managing this.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Spine 'neutral,' refers to the correct alignment of the spine. For most people, it requires them to gently activate their lower abdominals to slightly reduce to lumbar curve of the spine. Your Physiotherapist will help you to find this posture in your session.