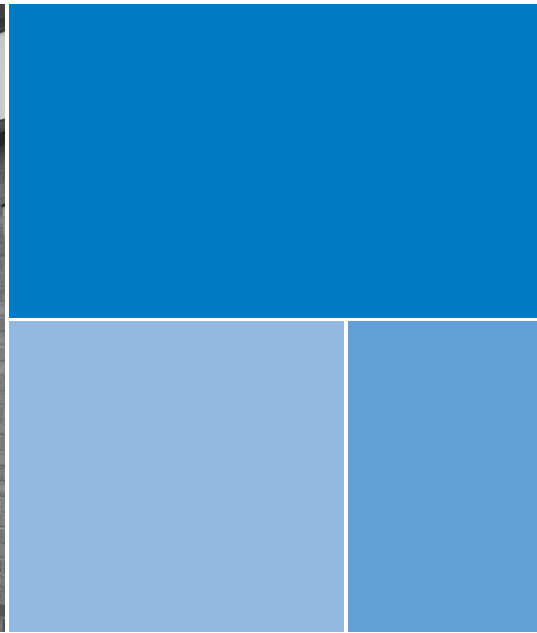


Physiotherapy Advice and Exercises for Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injury (OASI) - Patient Information



Women and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team

This patient information leaflet has been written by the Women and Men's Health Physiotherapy Department at the James Paget University Hospital to help ladies recover after a 3rd or 4th degree tear, also known as Obstetric Anal Sphincter injury (OASI).

It aims to highlight important exercises and advice which can aid muscle recovery, reduce the risk of adverse symptoms and to make you more comfortable. For further information on Obstetric Tears see the information at the back of your Postnatal Maternal Notes pack. You should make sure you cut off and keep this information section before your notes get handed back to your community midwife.

Symptoms that can appear following a 3rd or 4th degree tear include;

- A sensation of a lump in the vagina
- Leakage of urine
- Urgency to pass urine
- Urgency to open your bowels
- Leakage of faeces
- Pain during intercourse
- Pain and/or discomfort around the scar

What can I do to help speed up the healing process?

Keep the area clean. Have a bath or shower at least once a day and change your sanitary pads regularly (wash your hands before and after you do so). This will reduce your risk of infection. A clean wound is a healthy wound.

Drink plenty of fluids (around 2 litres a day) and eat a healthy balanced diet (fruit, vegetables, cereals, wholemeal bread and pasta). This will ensure your bowels open regularly therefore avoiding constipation. It is important **not to strain to open your bowels**. It is better for your bowel movements to be looser to avoid straining initially.

Laxatives – Can be taken to make it easier and more comfortable to open your bowels, such as a stool softener (lactulose) or a bulking agent such as Fybogel.

Going to the toilet - You should make sure that you sit on the toilet properly when you first try and empty your bladder on your own. Hovering over the toilet may not allow your bladder to empty properly. Try to relax and take your time. When you open your bowels you may find it helpful to support your stitches with a clean sanitary towel against them as you empty your bowels.

If you follow the instructions below and use the position in the diagram it will help you to empty your bowels more easily.

Keep your knees apart and higher than your hips (you may need a footstool).

Lean forwards and rest your forearms on your thighs whilst keeping your back straight.

Let your tummy relax, widen your waist and allow your abdominal muscles to bulge outwards making your waist wider.

Keep your mouth slightly open and your jaw relaxed. Breathe out. This allows your pelvic floor to remain relaxed.

Pull up your anal muscles as you finish emptying. This will improve the closing reflex.

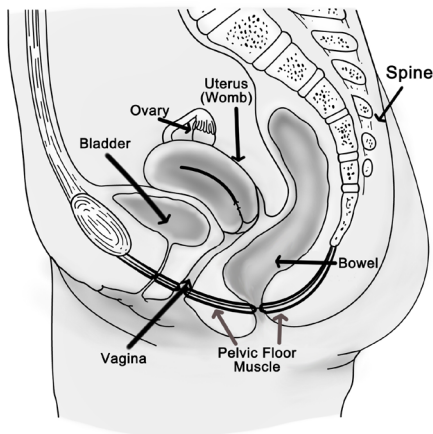


What can I do to improve or prevent any symptoms?

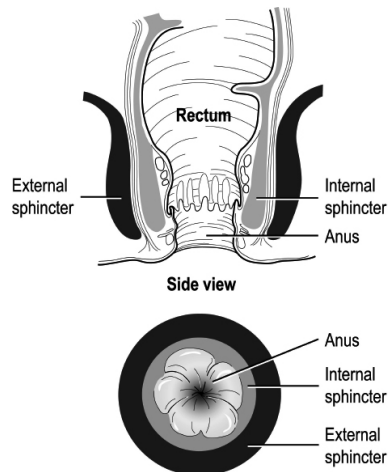
Pelvic floor and anal sphincter exercises

Your pelvic floor muscles work to keep the pelvic organs in the correct position (preventing prolapse) and to control your bladder and bowel by tightly closing the urethra and back passage, thereby preventing incontinence. They can also help improve sex. Your anal sphincter muscles work to close the anal canal (preventing incontinence of wind or poo).

Pelvic Floor Muscles



Anal Sphincter Muscles



Your pelvic floor and anal sphincter exercises can be performed in any position. To do the exercises, imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and urine at the same time. You can also think of squeezing tight in the vagina. You should feel your pelvic floor muscles and back passage squeeze and lift. Try not to squeeze your buttocks and legs, and breathe normally while you are doing these exercises. You may feel a gentle tightening in your lower abdominal muscles which is normal.

You can do your exercises when you have finished emptying your bladder whilst sitting on the toilet. **Do not practice stopping the flow of urine mid-stream as this could affect your bladder function in the longer term.**

It is recommended you start these exercises the day after your delivery. You need to practise both long squeezes and short squeezes and gradually build up your routine. As you do so your muscles will get stronger and your exercise programme will gradually increase.

Short Squeezes

Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor and anal sphincter muscles for a second and then relax for a few seconds.

Repeat until you feel that your muscles are tired.

Count how many times you can repeat your short squeezes.

Long Squeezes

Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor and anal sphincter muscles and hold for several seconds, and then relax for several seconds.

Count how long you can hold your muscles for. A strong pelvic floor should be able to hold for 10 seconds.

Repeat your long squeezes until you feel that your muscles are tired and count how many times you are able to repeat the exercise.

These exercises should be performed **at least 3 times a day**. Remember, they can be performed in any position, you may find it easier to start off lying down or sitting. As your muscles improve aim to do some of your exercises standing up.

You should also try to tighten your pelvic floor and anal sphincter muscles before you do anything that may put them under pressure, such as lifting, coughing or sneezing (this is called 'The Knack'). You can also squeeze these muscles to defer any urgency you might experience with your bowel or bladder.

What should I aim for with my pelvic floor exercises?

You will need to gradually build on your home exercise programme. For most women the eventual aim is to be able to perform:

10 short squeezes.

Followed by 10 long squeezes of up to 10 seconds each.

Start at a level that is comfortable for you and gradually increase this over the next few weeks.

Remembering to exercise

Make your pelvic floor and sphincter exercises a part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth. **You should continue with these exercises for the rest of your life.** Some tips to help you remember are:

Use coloured reminder notes or stickers around the house or at work.

You can do your exercises when you have finished emptying your bladder. **Do not practise stopping the flow of urine mid-stream as this could affect your bladder function in the longer term.**

You can link it to regular activities such as when you breastfeed or after meals.

If you have access to a smart phone or tablet computer, you may find it useful to look for applications to download which can help you train your pelvic floor muscles and act as a reminder.

Your follow up appointment

The Women and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team will aim to see you whilst you are on the maternity ward, if not you will be contacted via letter once you are home.

You will be provided with an outpatient appointment to see the physiotherapist at six weeks after your delivery where you

will have the opportunity to discuss any symptoms you may be experiencing. It is important you attend this appointment even if you are not experiencing any symptoms, and you should continue with your pelvic floor exercises until this time.

A vaginal and back passage examination is offered to assess the strength of your pelvic floor and anal sphincter muscles. This will help the physiotherapist recommend further treatment options available to you. Subsequent treatment sessions can then be arranged if deemed appropriate.

You will also be provided with a 3-4 month follow up appointment at the hospital with a gynaecologist. This is important to attend to review the tear once it is healed, and to provide an opportunity to discuss any symptoms you may be experiencing or answer any queries.

If you have concern regarding any symptoms prior to this, contact your midwife or General Practitioner.

If you have any queries or concerns with any information in this booklet please contact the Women and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team on 01493 452378.

References

The Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (2015)
Information for you: A third or fourth degree tear during birth
(also known as Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injury (OASI))

Pelvic Obstetric & Gynaecology Physiotherapy (2015)

The Pelvic Floor Muscles – A Guide for Women

<http://pogp.csp.org.uk/publications/pelvic-floor-muscle-exercises-women>

St Marks Hospital (2009)

Anal Sphincter exercises for leakage patient information leaflet, <http://www.stmarksnhshospital.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Anal-sphincter-exercises-for-leakage.pdf>

Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

Trust Values

Courtesy and respect

- A welcoming and positive attitude
- Polite, friendly and interested in people
- Value and respect people as individuals
So people feel **welcome**

Attentively kind and helpful

- Look out for dignity, privacy & humanity
- Attentive, responsive & take time to help
- Visible presence of staff to provide care
So people feel **cared for**

Responsive communication

- Listen to people & answer their questions
- Keep people clearly informed
- Involve people
So people feel **in control**

Effective and professional

- Safe, knowledgeable and reassuring
- Effective care / services from joined up teams
- Organised and timely, looking to improve
So people feel **safe**



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240

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