

Postpartum Pelvic Floor

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Pilates for Recovery

Pelvic Floor Support

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Recovery time range -

Birthing vaginally stretches and compresses the tissues to their potential. It takes many months, and often a year or more to recover. Long-term changes are likely for most women, but the symptoms from those issues are workable with mindful exercises performed regularly.

Your vagina, bladder, rectum, supporting ligaments and tissues are all affected by childbirth and need time and support to recover. Think of the pelvic floor and organs after childbirth in terms of a sprain. It takes 6 months to a year to recover from a sprained ankle, and it takes weeks or months for the swelling to reduce. In a similar way the pelvis has an acute phase, followed by a slow recovery process.

Common postpartum issues women experience and ideas for working with symptoms. At the end exercises are explained in detail.

Rectum –

*Hemorrhoids - shrink with witch hazel - deer exercise - reduce constipation

*Sphincter weakness/incontinence - deer exercise, rectal wall exercises - get enough fiber, reduce constipation

*Difficulty evacuating - reduce constipation - deer exercise - rectal wall exercises - squatting to defecate

*Painful wiping - peri bottle - witch hazel pads - sitz bath

Vagina –

- *Vaginal wall weakness - exercises - Jade Egg - yoga, Pilates, walking
- *Prolapse - exercises - Jade Egg – sea sponge - physical therapy - surgery
- *Air in vagina - reduces by around 8 weeks, much better by 4 months, can last long-term - exercises - avoiding inversions and wide squats
- *Dryness - lacerates walls - coconut oil or lubricant - lubrication returns when done nursing
- *Sex - pain, weakness, reduced orgasm while nursing

Bladder -

- *Bladder numbness - lasts up to a year or more, acute the first 6 months, longer if nursing
- *Bladder not emptying fully - squat to pee, give more time and relax - deer exercise – sea sponge
- *Leaking urine - exercises - Jade Egg - deer exercise – sea sponge - physical therapy - surgery
- *Urgency - try to empty bladder frequently - exercise - Jade Egg - physical therapy
- *Stress incontinence - deer exercise - exercises - Jade Egg - physical therapy

Pelvic Floor Exercises

First two weeks –

The first two weeks postpartum your body is going through a massive shift. The pelvic floor tissues are acutely affected. Simple exercises to help recover feeling and support are best during this time. Exercises explained below.

- *Slow motion sneeze
- *Deer exercise for urethra
- *Deer exercise for anus

After the first two weeks –

Pelvic floor muscles are postural. They work nearly all the time. When we add intensity to their work like in coughing/sneezing/laughing, lifting things, ballistic movements, we want the tissues to have a dimmer-switch activity. This means the tissues activate in the amount they need to, no more or less, and return to a resting activity after the big movement.

What often happens post birth is our tissues act more like on/off switches than dimmers. The tissues either stay 'off' or they over-activate. The innate intelligence of the postural muscles is lost to us when on/off strategies are going on, except with regard to sphincters.

When practicing pelvic floor exercises try to go through a spectrum of activation, imagine using 20% activation, 40%, 50%, 75%, 80%, etc. Go up the percentages and back down again. The muscles locked in to on/off switch activity will lack the ability to do this. Other muscles may seem very sluggish at moving through the percentages but will do it if you really concentrate.

When doing sphincter exercises don't worry about percentages/dimmer-switch activity. Sphincters ARE on/off switches, so this is perfectly fine for them to act like it. After childbirth they may be very slow in turning to the 'on' position, work at tightening and releasing sluggish sphincters.

The Exercises -

***Deer Exercise for Anal Sphincter** - The Taoists noticed animals tighten and release their anal sphincters after defecating. The Deer Exercise is a Taoist practice for strengthening the anal sphincter.

After defecating, tighten and release the anal sphincter several times before wiping. The tightening activity improves continence, as well as forcing blood through the sphincter area reducing hemorrhoids.

***Deer Exercise for Urethral Sphincter** - The urethral sphincter is an on/off switch like the anal sphincter. After urinating tighten and release the urethral sphincter several times, as if you are trying to get drips of urine off, and then wipe as normal. The activity after urinating helps wake up the sphincter so it can maintain continence better, reducing incontinence issues.

***Slow Motion Sneeze** - Imagine you are about to sneeze, go through the process in slow motion. Say, 'Ahhhhhh choooooooo' and with the chooo sound activate your pelvic floor to empty your lungs of air. This gathers up the pelvic floor tissues, which work with the lungs to force-expel air out. Practice this several times in a row. If you have vaginal/urinary weakness you can repeat this throughout the day. Once you feel strong again, reduce practice to twice a week.

***Side Walls of the Vagina** - Imagine there's a Jade Egg or a ball of warm light in the center of your vaginal canal. Pull the sidewalls towards the Egg/Light as if you are trying to hug it. Exhale while doing this, keep the activity for three breath cycles, and then release slowly like you are turning down a dimmer switch. Repeat 5 times, 3 times per day for acute issues.

***Front and Back Walls of the Vagina** - Imagine there's a Jade Egg or ball of warm light in the center of your vaginal canal. Pull the front and back walls towards the Egg/Light as if you are trying to hug it. Exhale while doing this, keep the activity for three breath cycles, and then release slowly like you are turning down a dimmer switch. Repeat 5 times, 3 times per day for acute issues.

***Cervix Lift** - Imagine a lover is inside of you, the head of his penis is resting against your cervix. Try to squeeze just the head of his penis, not the shaft, and hold it for three breath cycles. Repeat 5 times, 3 times per day for acute issues.

***Rectal Wall Support** - Imagine you could draw your rectal walls together, but let the sphincter stay relaxed. Hold this engagement for three breath cycles, and then release slowly like you are turning down a dimmer switch. Repeat 5 times, 3 times per day for acute issues.

Props and Other Resources –

***Jade Egg** - The Jade Egg is a Taoist tool used to create a closed kinetic chain inside the vaginal canal. The feeling of the egg helps awaken the tissues, allowing them to relearn how to move towards it. The Jade Egg can be used as a recovery tool, or it can be utilized in the fuller context of the Taoist feminine practices that include breath work, self-massage, awareness, and pelvic floor activation.

For Jade Egg pelvic floor education contact Melissa Macourek 253-906-2200
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For Taoist feminine practices contact Najeea Leslie 253-274-0137
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***Sea Sponge** - Sea sponges are available online. They can be cut into the shape/size you need. Using a sea sponge can delay/stop the need for surgery, depending on the degree of prolapse/incontinence. The sponge expands to fill in the canal, pushing the organs/tissues back into more optimum alignment.

***Pelvic Floor Education** - Learning how the pelvic floor works, how to do strengthening exercises to address your specific problems will benefit you the rest of your life. Contact Melissa Macourek 253-906-2200 for private sessions. Usually 3 - 5 sessions are all you need to learn exercises for your specific issues.

***Physical Therapy** - Physical therapists use specialized tools to help awaken numb tissues. Insurance may cover part or all of the PT sessions. If you see a doctor for prolapse issues you'll likely be referred to PT before being considered for surgery.

***Surgery** - Some prolapses require surgical correction. If your prolapse is pushing out of your body, or there is a hole in the back wall of your vagina, you'll likely require surgery. Many techniques are used for pelvic floor repair, please look into them and get second opinions. Although surgery can be of great benefit, it also tends to have its own side effects. Use the acronym BRAN when discussing options with caregivers. What are the Benefits? What are the Risks? What are the Alternatives? What if I do Nothing?