



## Advice and Exercises Following a Third or Fourth Degree Tear

A third or fourth degree tear causes trauma to the muscles at the back of the vagina to the ring of muscle around the back passage (the anal sphincter). This tear has been repaired following your delivery. This leaflet has been designed to provide you with information and advice to make you more comfortable and to help recover the strength in your pelvic floor muscles.

### From Day 1

Pain relief will be provided by your midwife or doctor. Use this to help you to keep mobile as this will help with the healing process. An ice-pack can help to reduce swelling and can be soothing. As this is a sensitive area, ensure that you wrap the ice pack in a clean damp flannel before placing it on the area between your front and back passage.

Caution: Ice can burn so do not leave it in place for more than 5 minutes.

### Your Bladder

It is common to have a catheter in place initially. When this is removed, it can take time for the normal sensations in your bladder to return. It is important that you don't allow your bladder to overfill. Therefore, try and empty your bladder regularly by going to the toilet (every couple of hours) until the normal feelings return. Take your time to ensure that your bladder empties properly.

Caution: Alert your midwife if you are unable to pass urine.

### Your Bowels

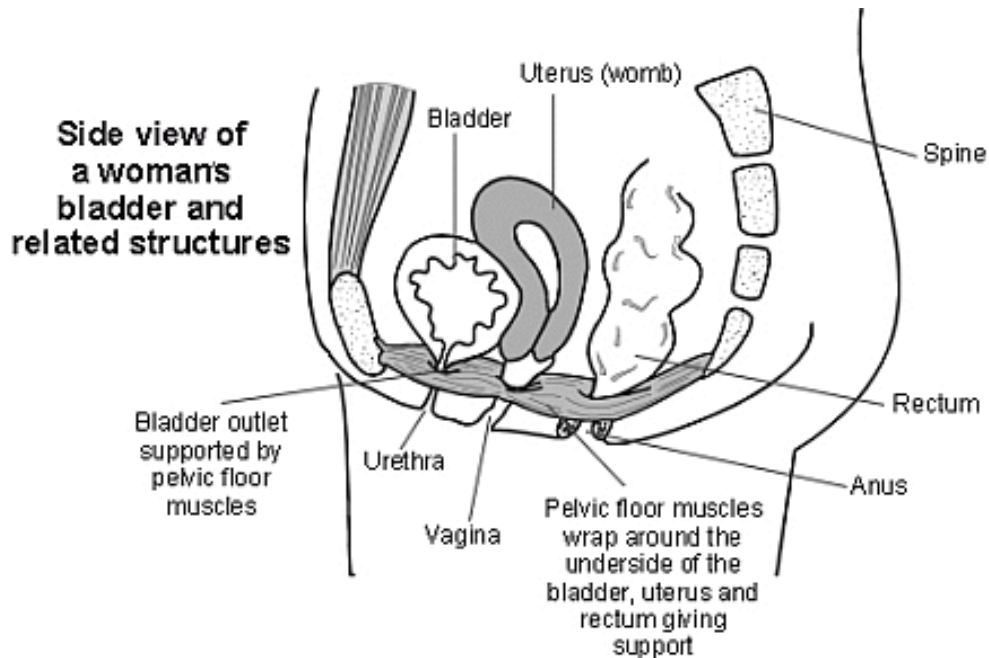
To gain your confidence with emptying your bowels (defecating: having a poo), it can help to use a clean sanitary pad, or wrap your hand in a wad of toilet paper and hold it against the area just in front of your back passage to support it while you gently bear down with a series of short pushes (rather than straining).

You can be given medication (in the form of a laxative) that will help to soften your stools and make them easier to pass; you can help by drinking enough fluid and ensuring that you eat plenty of soluble fibre (fruit and vegetables). This will help you to avoid becoming constipated.



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## Pelvic Floor Exercises



The pelvic floor muscles form a tight sling at the base of the pelvis; they run from the pubic bone to the tailbone or coccyx and pass around the passages to your bladder, vagina and rectum.

Functions of the pelvic floor muscles are:

- Support of the bladder, uterus and rectum
- Provide bladder, sexual and bowel control

The muscles work all day even when we are asleep, they respond to exercise which helps to improve strength, provide bladder, bowel and sexual control.

There is a small risk, because of the area of your tear that you may have problems with the control of your bladder or bowels in the next few weeks, or later in life as you approach the menopause.

It is very important to exercise your pelvic floor muscles to help them to recover their strength.

Caution: wait until your catheter has been removed before commencing these exercises.



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## Exercise method

Sit on a chair, with your legs apart, pull your pelvic floor muscles up, tighten your pelvic floor muscles by squeezing your back passage, lifting up and towards your pubic bone ('squeeze and lift'). As you do the exercise you should feel the back passage and vagina tightening and rising, this is normal.

In the early stages following your delivery, you may only be able to hold for a few seconds a couple of times.

Try to gradually build up to hold the muscles for 5-10 seconds rest and repeat 5-10 times, do the exercise 3-4 times a day. This may take several weeks, even months to achieve this.

Try not to:

- Hold your breath
- Pull in your tummy
- Squeeze your buttocks
- Draw your knees together

## Positions of Ease

You may find sitting uncomfortable for a short time after your delivery as the structures at your perineum are healing. To increase your comfort you could try using 2 folded towels. Place one under each buttock cheek to offload this area until it becomes more comfortable.

## What happens next?

You will be sent a letter at approximately 6 weeks post-natal offering an appointment to see a Women's Health Physiotherapist. We strongly recommend that you arrange this appointment to avoid problems such as incontinence occurring in the future. Seeing an appropriate clinician will provide you with an ideal opportunity to ask questions.

In addition, the Women's Health Physiotherapist can check your pelvic floor strength is returning to normal, and ensure that any problems with bladder or bowel control are dealt with quickly.

If you need more advice about anything in this leaflet, you can call the Women's Health Physiotherapy Team on **01793 604821**



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This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email [gwh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:gwh.pals@nhs.net)

**Document Control**

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