

Pregnancy and giving birth have consequences that are mostly reversible on the rectal and vaginal muscular structures of the pelvic floor. But strengthening and stretching exercises of the pelvic floor and abdominal muscles will often be needed to get back to your initial physical condition. However, these exercises need to be customized and adapted to your own individuals need for them to be effective.

While giving birth it is common to have a perineal tear or episiotomy. The consequences can be minimal to severe depending on the degree of the tear or cut and the quality of the scar. If the muscle is affected it can lead to organ prolapse and it can also lead to impairments of the urinary, bowel and sexual functions. Moreover, these impairments can appear even with a caesarian or if there is no visual tear of the pelvic floor.

At this stage of post-partum recovery, you should feel like you have control over your urinary, bowel and sexual functions along with a good internal organ support.

All of the following should be resolved:

- Difficult contraction of the vaginal and rectal muscles
- Vaginal or perineal pain and heaviness
- Pain with intercourse
- Urine leakages on effort (coughing, sneezing, running)
- Urine leakages with the need to urinate
- Urgent and pressing need to go to the bathroom
- Increased frequency of micturition (need to urinate)
- Organ prolapse (bump at vaginal opening)
- Stool leakages or difficulty to hold in gases
- Constipation or difficult bowel movement
- Hemorrhoids or anal fissure (pain and bleeding with passage of stool)
- Pelvis, pubic or back pain

If you have any of the problems cited above, you should be aware that treatment is important in order to prevent any deterioration of you condition and it is possible to get back quickly to your initial condition with adequate management. Furthermore, if you plan on having another child preventive exercise can help you decrease the risk of developing one of the complications cited above during pregnancy or post-partum.

Additionally, you can start back pelvic floor exercises as soon as the day after delivery, especially if you have a perineal tear or cut to manage edema and pain. The intensity of physical exercise can be gradually increased during the 3<sup>rd</sup> month post-partum but high impact activities involving repetitive jumps such as trampoline, jumping rope and aerobic classes should be limited. If one of the complications cited above remains present 3 months post-partum you should decrease the intensity of your physical activity and start a pelvic floor strengthening program.