



# Swansea Bay University Health Board

## Gynaecological Oncology Post Surgery Recovery

### Patient Information Leaflet



The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information on what you can do to help your recovery following gynaecological surgery. Take your time and don't compare yourself to others no matter how similar their operation is to yours. We are all different.

### **What to expect following your surgery.**

Immediately following surgery you will be taken to a ward to recover. You may have a catheter in and this will be removed as quickly as possible. Every surgery is different and the time a catheter is in for will vary.

Nursing staff will encourage you to get up and about as quickly as possible. To aid this you will be encouraged to wear clothes rather than pyjamas or nighties. Think about wearing loose clothing that will not put pressure your wound. Skirts may be easier due to catheters.

You will also be fitted for compression stockings and encouraged to wear these for a period of time.

### **Pain relief:**

You will be sent home with pain relief and once you have used this you are able to take regular pain medication as advised. If you are having difficulty managing your pain or are unsure what to take then speak to your GP or community pharmacist.

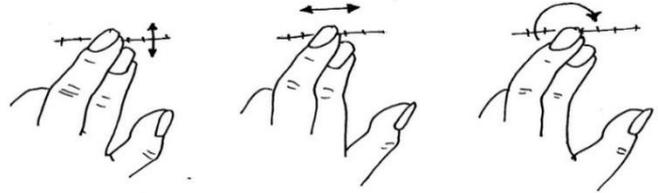
### **Wound Care:**

You will be advised when leaving hospital how to take care of your wound and if any stitches should be removed. If you notice any oozing or smelly discharge, or feel unwell or feverish then please seek medical advice. Once your scar has closed completely then we recommend scar massage.



## Scar Massage:

Once your wound has healed you can begin scar massage. First start by touching your scar to settle the tissue. Then move the scar in an up-down/side to side and a circular motion. Do this daily.



When this is comfortable you can move on to tissue rolling. Pick up the scar and roll it between your thumbs and fingers making sure that the tissue is free to move.



It is normal for this to be uncomfortable, this is because you are stretching tissue.



## **Breathing Exercises:**

Breathing exercises are helpful as they keep your lungs healthy and help you to relax.

Practice deep breathing a few times a day. Take a slow, deep breath in letting your tummy raise.

Hold before slowly breathing out.

Repeat this 3 to 5 times or as many times as you need to.

## **Supported Cough:**

We all need to cough at times.

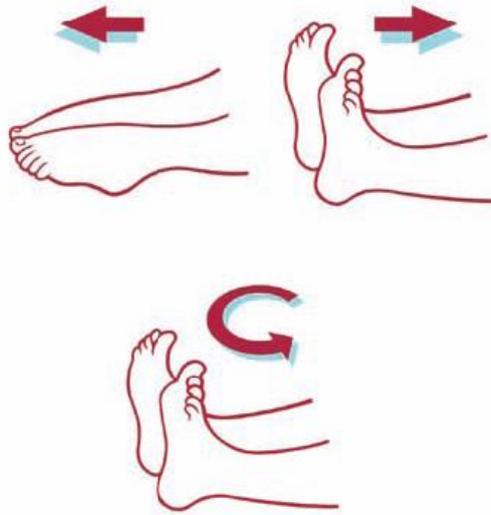
If you feel that you need to cough, have a rolled up towel or a cushion to hand. Use this to apply pressure to support your wound.

Use this for sneezing as well.



## Circulation Exercises:

Until you are up and about as normal circulation exercises are recommended. To do these have your legs out straight. Pull up and push down your toes quickly, 20 times. Follow these circling your ankles one way and then the other, 10 times.



Do this every 1 to 2 hours during the day, until you are back to full activity.



## Alcohol:

Immediately post-surgery you may be advised to avoid alcohol. Look at your intake and stick to the recommendations.

Alcohol intake may hinder your recovery post-surgery or going into treatment. Reducing your intake to no more than 14 units a week can help.

If you are concerned about the amount you are drinking contact your GP or alternatively you can access support from:

**Drink line. Tel:** 0300 123 1110

**DAN 24/7. Tel:** 0808 808 2234

**Alcoholics Anonymous. Tel:** 0800 9177 650

## Smoking:

Stopping smoking is the biggest change you can make.

If you smoke it is advised that you stop if you are able to. Smoking increases the risk of developing lung infections following surgery. Smoking has also been shown to delay wound healing, make pain harder to manage and slow your general recovery.

Being able to quit takes planning and if someone else in your house smokes then quitting together may help. Your CNS, GP or community pharmacist may be able to provide assistance.

Alternatively you can contact [Help Me Quit Wales](#) on: 0808 163 3031.





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MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT

## Eat Well:

Maintain a healthy diet. Include plenty of fresh vegetables, current guidelines are at least 5 portions a day. Fibre rich foods can help keep your stool soft. Special foods and supplements are only necessary if they've been prescribed, and then take as advised by the prescribing professional.

If you are having difficulty preparing a balanced diet then [The Eat Well](#) guide is a great resource.



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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## Fluid:

Keep hydrated. This helps again to keep your stool soft and helps your bladder stay healthy

Aim to take in about 8 glasses during the day, this is about 1.5 to 2 litres or around 3 pints. Water is ideal but all fluid counts. Limit fruit juices and sugary drinks as these can contain a lot of calories.

Drinking too much caffeine and fizzy drinks can irritate the bladder making you need to wee more and also interfere with your quality of sleep if drunk late on in the day.

If you are drinking too little you may find that you struggle with your energy levels, concentration and are prone to constipation and urine infections. Drinking too much can also cause difficulties as you may need to go to the toilet too frequently. And in extreme cases this can cause some imbalances.

## Top tips:

- ✓ Aim to keep a healthy weight
- ✓ Eat regular meals
- ✓ Drink between 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid daily.
- ✓ Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains & pulses such as beans.
- ✓ Avoid sugary drinks & limit processed foods high in added sugar, or low fibre or high in fat.
- ✓ Limit red meat and avoid processed meats.
- ✓ Balance dietary fats & cut down on saturated fat
- ✓ Limit salt and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- ✓ Avoid extreme diets or supplements.

Adapted from The Eat Well guide



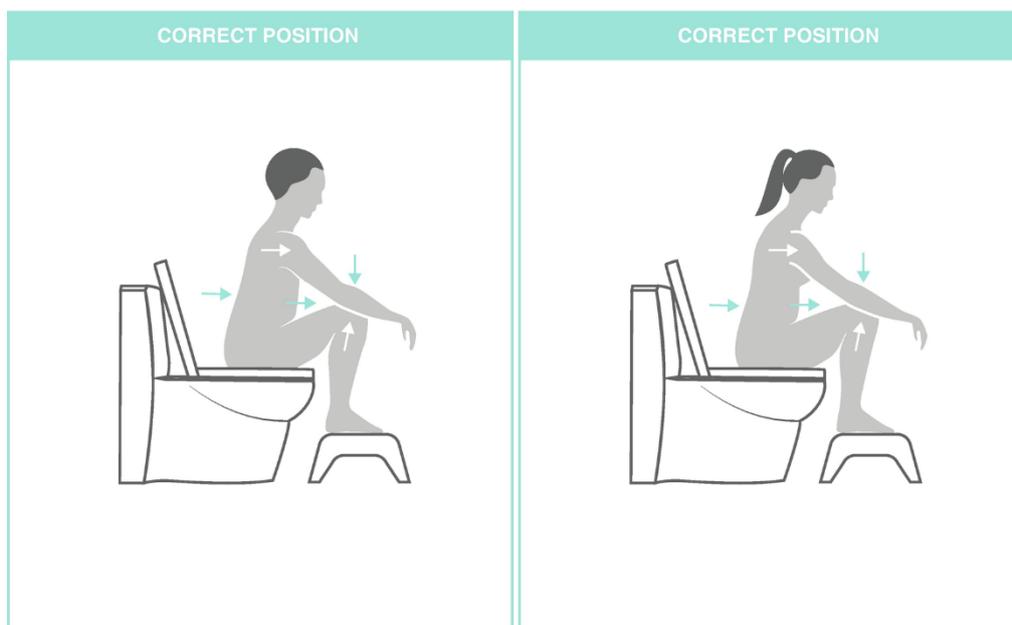
## Bowel Movements

It is important that you have your bowels open regularly and try to avoid constipation. Straining can put pressure on your wound. You may be recommended to take laxatives on leaving hospital. Take these as advised by the prescribing professional.

Simple steps you can take to keep your stool soft are to drink plenty of water and eat a healthy, varied diet.

Adopting a good position on the toilet can help to reduce straining.

Simply using a stool to raise your knees higher than your hips, resting your hands on your knees can help to reduce the need to strain.



## Specific exercises:

### Pelvic Floor Exercises.

As soon as you are catheter free, pelvic floor exercises can be started. Pelvic floor exercises are extremely important for all women regardless of having surgery or not. They help with bladder and bowel control and sexual function.

To do a pelvic floor exercises start by squeezing around your anus as if you are stopping passing wind. Draw up and feel the squeeze continue around the vagina and urethra at the front. Hold. And then let go it is important to let go and feel the pelvic floor drop.

Do gentle relaxed breathing allowing your tummy to raise and fall with your breath before repeating this squeeze.

Vary the exercise between fast squeezes, squeezing as hard as you can and then letting go. With longer holds.

Slowly increase the length of time you can hold the squeeze, aiming to be able to hold for 10 seconds. And always remember to let go.

Aim to complete this exercise little and often during the day. It is recommended that you incorporate pelvic floor exercises into your daily routine. You can link them to something that you already complete daily such as cleaning your teeth, or meal times. Alternatively there are a number of apps such as the NHS endorsed SqueezyApp that you can down load to a smart phone.





## **Talk More:**

You may feel like you need some support or to just talk about your feelings. You may have support close at hand to talk through your thoughts, or you may wish to speak to an impartial person. The organisations below can help.

Support from organisations.

### **Macmillan Cancer Support**

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Tel: 0808 808 0000

### **Maggie's**

Free information and support for anyone affected by cancer.

#### **Maggie's Swansea**

<https://www.maggies.org/our-centres/maggies-swanea/>

Tel: 01792 200000

#### **Maggie's Cardiff**

<https://www.maggies.org/our-centres/maggies-cardiff/>

Tel: 029 2240 8024

### **The Eve Appeal.**

<https://eveappeal.org.uk/>

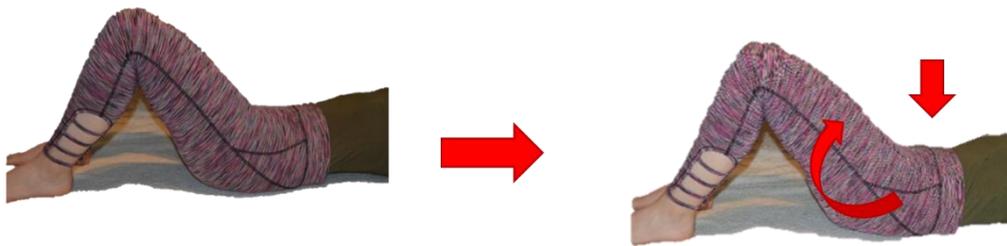
Tel: 0808 802 0019



You can help your abdominal muscles by gradually increasing their strength through exercises. We have included some suitable exercises to help your abdominal muscles to recover.

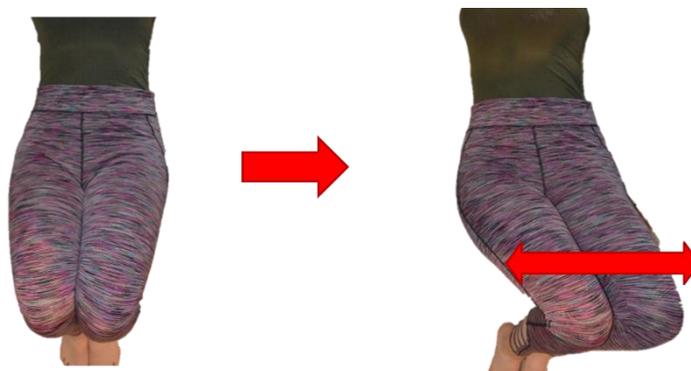
### **Pelvic tilt.**

This exercise can be started early on in your recovery. Lie on your back on a firm surface such as a bed. Bend your knees and support your head on pillows if necessary. Slowly draw in your lower tummy, flattening your back and you will feel your bottom curl slightly off the bed. DO not aim for a big movement. Then slowly curl down to your starting position. Repeat this exercise a few times.



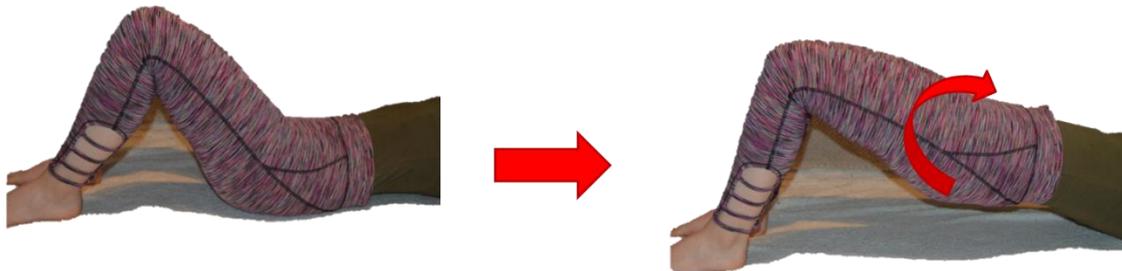
### **Knee Rolling:**

This exercise can also be done early on once a wound has healed. Lying on a firm surface such as your bed, support your head and bend your knees. Keeping your upper back in contact with the bed at all times, move your knees slowly side to side. This exercise should be gentle and pain free. Repeat this exercise a few times.



### Bridging:

This is an advanced exercise, when you are comfortable and you are able to do more of your normal activity you can add this in. Lying flat on a firm surface draw in your lower tummy and curl up your bottom. Go as high as you are able to do so. If you can hold at the top and then slowly return to a lying position. Repeat this exercise a few times.



### Crunching

This is also an advanced exercise. When you are happy with bridging and not before you feel strong enough you can add this in. Start by lying on a firm surface with your hand on your thighs. Keeping the small of your back in contact with the bed by drawing in your lower tummy. Slowly reach your hands upwards towards your knees bring your shoulders off the surface you are lying on. Hold and then lower and let go. Repeat this exercise a few times.



### Returning to Activity:

There is no specific time to return to your normal activity.  
Gradually work towards what is normal for you.  
Think of the 3 P's.

**Prioritise** what you want or need to get done on a specific day.

**Plan** your day to ensure that you are being active throughout the day and give yourself rest periods. Try and stick to a daily routine.

**Pace** your self – try not to go from lots of activity to nothing.

### Work:

Some women are able to return to work as soon as 6 weeks post-surgery, some are not ready until 12 weeks.

This will be dependent on what surgery you have had, how your recovery has progressed and what type of job you do. It will also depend on if other treatment is needed.

Do not rush to go back to work if you do not feel ready, also if you feel well and want to return then that is also your decision.

### Driving:

Your consultant or doctor should advise on when you are able to resume driving. This is not until at least 6 weeks following surgery. To be ready to drive you must be able to comfortably move your legs and perform an emergency stop. When you are ready it is recommended that you inform your insurance company.

### Sex:

Resume sexual intercourse when you are comfortable, unless you have been told to avoid sex. If you are having difficulty with resuming sexual intercourse or intimacy, speak to your CNS or physiotherapy.

If you are unsure or worried about any return to normal activity seek medical advice.





## Contact details:

**Jo Norris,**

Macmillan Gynae-Oncology Physiotherapist  
Women's Health Physiotherapy Department  
Singleton Hospital

Telephone: 01792 285229 / Mobile: 07971 592210

Notes:

Use this page to note any questions that you may have.

