

Pregnancy Education



Womens Pelvic Health



Penrith
Physiotherapy
Sports Centre







Contents

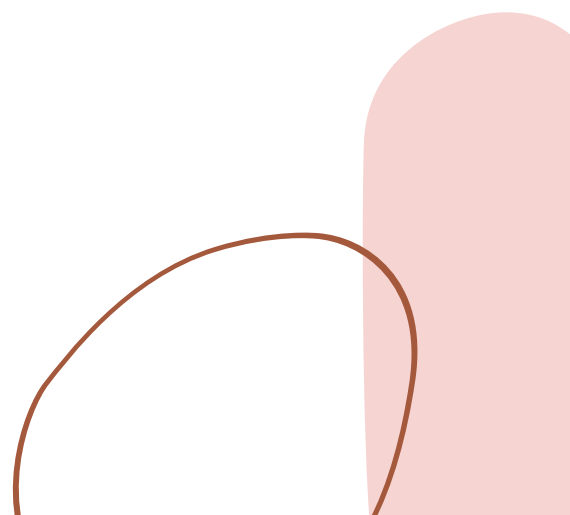
- CHANGES THROUGH PREGNANCY
- THE PELVIC FLOOR
- BLADDER AND BOWEL CARE
- EXERCISE IN PREGNANCY
- ACHES AND PAINS
- BIRTH PREP
- THE POSTNATAL CHECK



Changes Through Pregnancy

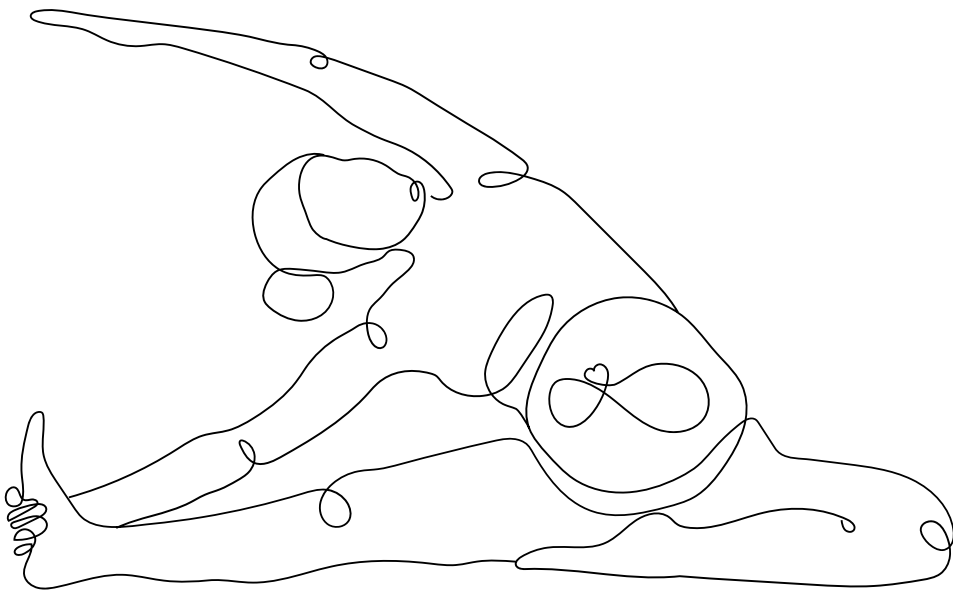
Our bodies make amazing changes to help support a growing baby. Many of these changes are driven by different hormones produced through phases of a pregnancy.

- **Increased Flexibility:** This is a good thing, as it helps your body to accommodate a growing baby. It also helps your pelvis to prepare for delivery. To reduce the chance of flexibility causing joint or muscle pain, it is important to exercise regularly and stay strong.
- **Postural Changes:** With a growing belly, more of your weight will be at the front of your body. To compensate for this, many women find themselves leaning backward and swaying side the side as they walk (aka the pregnancy waddle).
- **Heart Changes:** Your heart will adjust to pump more blood and may increase how quickly it beats. Often there will be a decrease in blood pressure through the first trimester as your body adjusts. To support your blood pressure through pregnancy, remember to drink lots of water, and take your time standing after lying or sitting for prolonged periods.



Changes Through Pregnancy

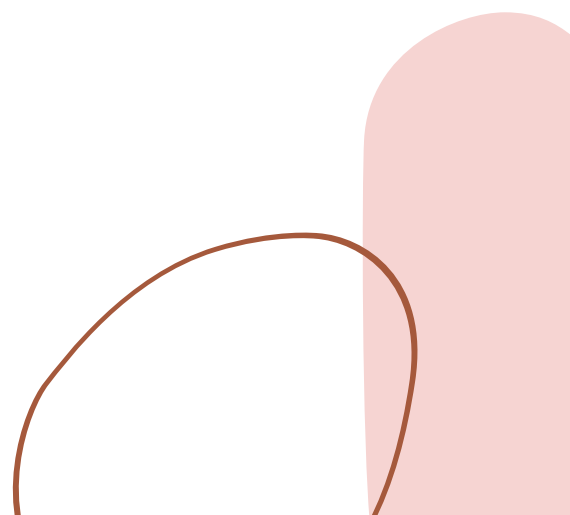
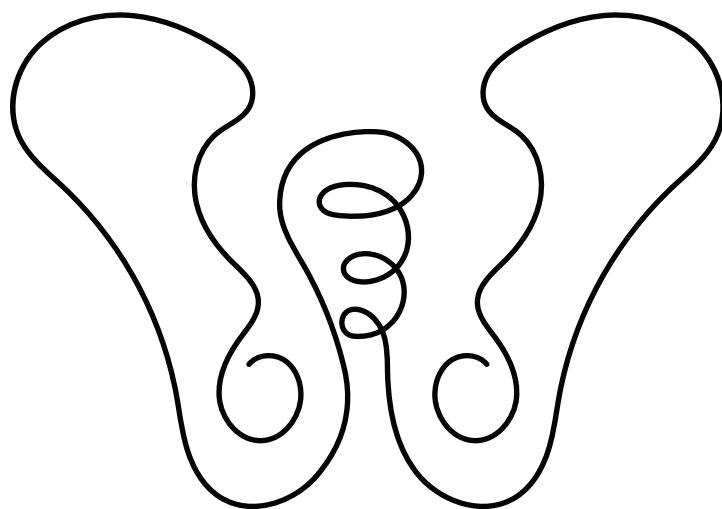
- **Lung Changes:** Your body will require more oxygen to help support a pregnancy. Flexibility changes mean that your chest circumference may increase as ligaments relax. Through pregnancy, women are also more likely to become breathless due to the increased oxygen needs, and reduced lung capacity.
- **Bowel Changes:** Many women struggle with constipation or haemorrhoids through pregnancy. This is because as the gut slows, more water is absorbed in the colon, and the smooth muscles surrounding the bowel area become more relaxed. Remember to drink lots of water and consider using a stool in the bathroom to prevent straining when passing a bowel motion.

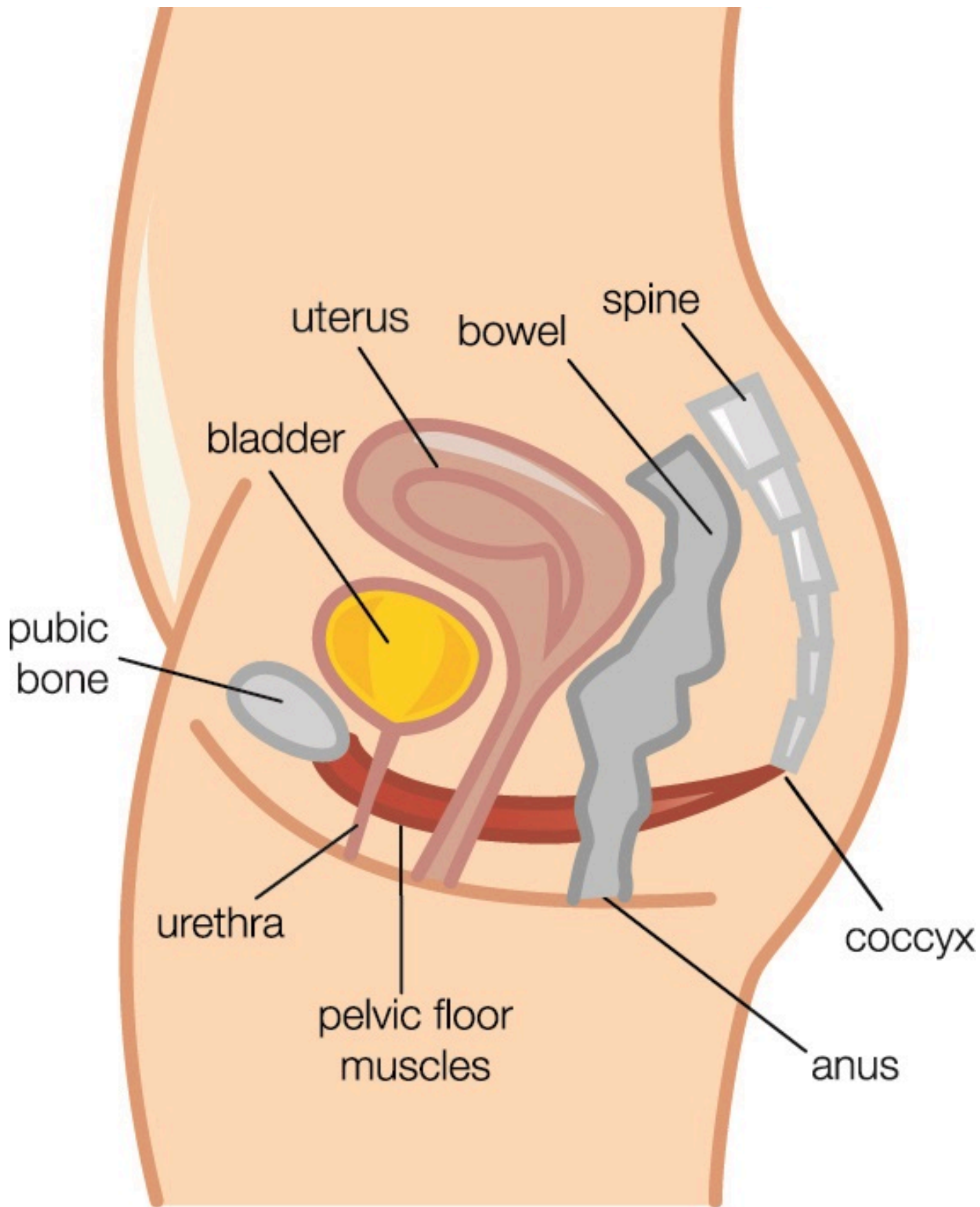


The Pelvic Floor

The pelvic floor is a collection of muscles that sits like a bowl at the bottom of your pelvis. This group of muscles functions by supporting your internal pelvic organs (bladder, bowel and uterus), squeezing to prevent leakage from the bladder or bowel, and has a large role in sexual function due to the anatomy of the clitoral nerves.

Regardless of the type of birth you're preparing for, the pelvic floor is affected by the pregnancy itself. Imagine a bowling ball is being supported on a trampoline. Overtime, the muscles (trampoline) will gradually become tired from working hard to support a growing baby (the bowling ball). Another factor to consider is that the hormones in your body that allow your body to stretch and accommodate a growing baby, will also affect the ligaments and muscles within the pelvic floor group by making them more flexible.

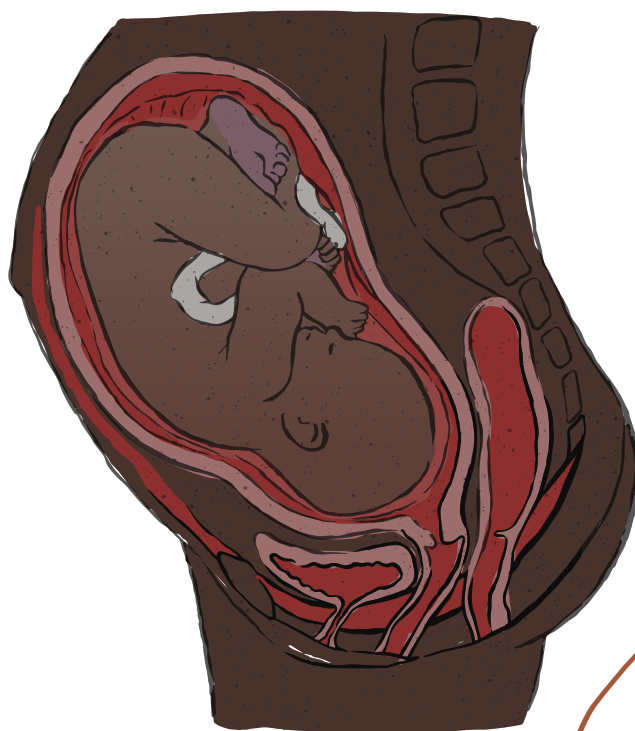




The Pelvic Floor

It is important to complete regular pelvic floor muscle training throughout your pregnancy to help support this group of muscles. However, it's not as simple as saying "10 squeezes!". Each person will present with different baseline pelvic floor strength, and different awareness of how to contract and release this muscle group. If we imagine a bowl like structure, the pelvic floor can be lower and laxer, or higher and perhaps too tight.

To ensure that you're completing pelvic floor exercises with a good technique, and in a routine that is right for you, then we need to understand your pelvic floor. We can achieve this through an internal assessment in a Women's Health Physiotherapy appointment. Within this appointment we will assess the length, strength, and coordination of your pelvic floor. Which means that you can be provided with a personalised pelvic floor exercise program specially designed to suit you!



The Pelvic Floor

How do I know if something is wrong?

- Do I have to rush and run to the toilet for a wee?
- Do I leak urine while rushing to the toilet?
- Do I leak urine when I cough, or sneeze, or exercise?
- Am I struggling with constipation?
- Do I leak stool from my bowel?
- Am I experiencing pain during intercourse?

If you answered 'yes' to any of the questions above, then pelvic floor physiotherapy can help you.

We like to say "Common, but not normal".

- Common – many women experience pelvic floor dysfunction; you are not alone.
- Not normal – we don't want you experiencing these symptoms! There are so many treatment tools to help.



Bladder Health

Through pregnancy, your body will produce a lot more blood and your blood pressure will reduce. It is important to support these changes with good quality fluid intake. The amount will look different for each person. Ensure your urine is a pale-yellow colour. Clear – you may be drinking too much. Dark and strong smelling – likely dehydrated. Consider that your fluid intake needs will vary with the weather, your activities through the day, and how much you exercise.

Top Tips:

- **Water Intake:** Keep a drink bottle nearby, try and regularly sip from your drink bottle during the day. Your body will need more water during pregnancy to support your blood pressure and ensure both you and baby are well hydrated.
- **Daily Wees:** A healthy number of times to empty your bladder each day is between 6–7. This number is likely to increase as you progress through pregnancy, especially with a little foot providing helpful kicks to the bladder. If you are much lower, you may be dehydrated and need more water.
- **Fully Emptying:** Ensure you're fully emptying your bladder each time you go to the bathroom. If you get the sensation that you haven't quite finished, try tilting your pelvis back and forth on the toilet.



Bowel Health

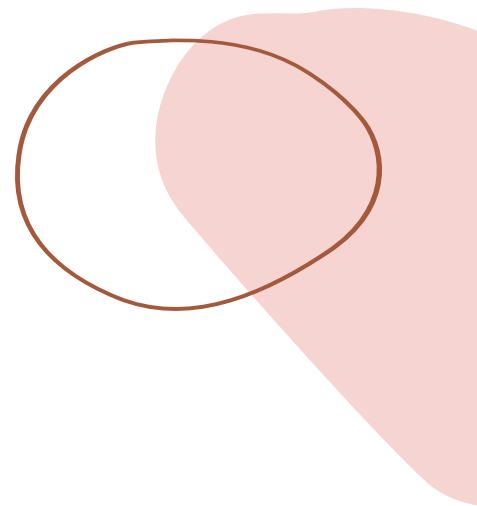
A key aspect of bowel care through pregnancy is reducing constipation. Constipation can result in further heaviness in the pelvis. If not managed effectively, straining to open your bowels can cause weakness or worsen tightness in the pelvic floor. Constipation in pregnancy will often occur near big hormonal changes. It is also influenced by water intake and diet.

Common Causes of Bowel Trouble

- Dehydration
- Straining to pass a bowel motion
- Overly tight pelvic floor muscles
- Bowel prolapse

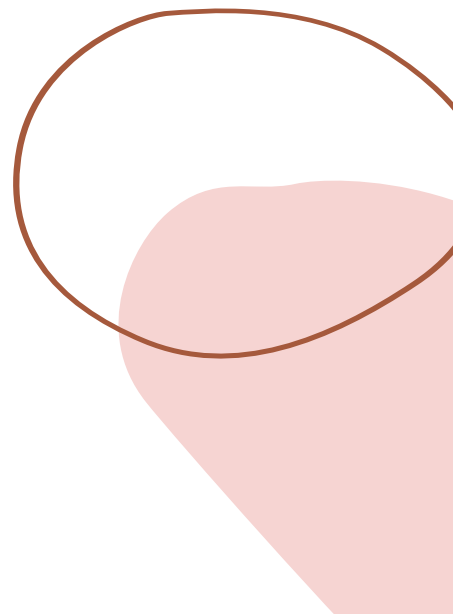
Top Tips:

- **Water intake:** Ensure you sip water gradually throughout the day. Water intake has a big relationship to stool quality and will help your stools to be soft.
- **Diet:** A happy gut begins with what we eat. Ensure you are eating a variety of fibre-rich foods, including lots of fruit and vegetables.
- **Exercise:** Physical activity helps to stimulate bowel movement. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days.



Bowel Health

- **Avoid straining:** Straining causes muscles in the pelvis to tighten, which makes it more difficult to pass a bowel motion! Instead, try to relax through your pelvis and take 'big belly breaths'. Consider using a stool to support your feet.
- **Listen to your 'urge':** Often we are busy and ignore our urge to go to the toilet. The stool then travels back up the colon and sits in a storage section. As it sits here, water continues to be drawn out of the stool. This means the stool becomes harder and more difficult to pass.
- **Timing:** We experience a natural urge within an hour of us waking up most mornings. To support this natural urge, try drinking a hot drink (tea, coffee, hot water with lemon) first thing in the morning. This gives our gut a kickstart! 20 minutes after your hot drink, go and sit on the toilet to see if your body is ready to pass a bowel motion.



Exercise in Pregnancy

There can be a lot of fear, and poor-quality information about how to exercise well through pregnancy. Many women even choose not to exercise as they're unsure about what to do, and what may cause harm. So, let's settle some common questions and misconceptions.

- In an uncomplicated pregnancy, exercise does not harm you or your baby!
- Regular exercise reduces the risk of medical complications such as high blood pressure, gestational diabetes, and pre-eclampsia. Exercise also helps reduce the risk of needing instrumental assistance (like vacuum or forceps) during a vaginal delivery.
- Exercise helps our mental health and can be a protective factor for those managing anxiety or depression.
- Exercise helps to manage symptoms of lower back or pelvic pain through pregnancy.



Exercise in Pregnancy

So how much should I exercise?

- Include a variety of cardio (like walking, stationary cycling, swimming) and strength exercises.
- Aim for 2 x strength sessions a week. This could include pilates or weights.
- Aim for 150 minutes of moderate exercise like walking or swimming each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise like stationary cycling.

Should I avoid anything?

- We advise against participating in high-impact and contact sports through pregnancy due to the risk of a hit or fall on your belly.
- We encourage women not to exercise for prolonged periods flat on their back after the first trimester. This is because it can cause changes to the blood flow to you and your baby.



Exercise in Pregnancy

I haven't exercised in a long time, where should I start?

- Start with walking 15–20mins around your local park. Each week, build up by 5 minutes until you're able to manage a 30-minute walk most days.
- Look into 'The Empowered Motherhood' program. An online resource of pilates exercises and weekly progression plans designed by women's health physios to support women through all phases of pregnancy.
- Join our pregnancy pilates classes and learn how to safely move your body.



Safety in Exercise

Signs to **Cease** Exercise

- Sudden onset of dizziness, shortness of breath or chest pain
- Vaginal spotting or bleeding
- Sudden and significant swelling in the ankles, hands or face
- Decreased movement of baby
- Please see your GP or Obstetrician



Signs to **Modify** Exercise

- Lower back pain
- Pelvic, tail bone or hip pain
- Carpel tunnel symptoms
- Struggling to hold good technique (Breath holding or overly bracing)
- Abdominal doming
- Please see your physio



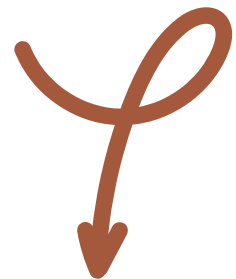
Pregnancy Pilates

Did you know that we run pregnancy pilates classes at the clinic? These small group classes are run by a physiotherapist with extra training in supporting women through pregnancy. It's a fun and relaxed environment exercising with others.

Our pregnancy pilates class is for you if you want to:

- Stay strong and move well
- Meet other pregnant ladies
- Need support managing back or pelvic pain
- Need support exercising through a higher risk pregnancy
- Learn more about pregnancy and your pelvic floor

*Book!
Now!*



Aches and Pains

Through pregnancy the body changes to become more flexible and adapts to new positions as your baby grows. Often this can result in pain and discomfort through the back, pelvis and hips. Try these general tips below. If you need support managing aches and pains through pregnancy, come and see us at the clinic! There are lots of tools available to help with your symptoms.

General Tips:

- Wear low-heeled shoes
- Apply heat to painful muscles
- Try a support garment like pregnancy shorts
- Exercise via walking or swimming



Pelvic Girdle Pain

Pain is experienced either at the pubic symphysis (front of the pelvis), or either the left or right sacroiliac joint (buttock area). When all three joints are involved – this is called pelvic girdle syndrome. Pain can travel to the lower back, the thighs, the hips, or to the groin area.



Specific Tips:

- Reduce time standing on one leg, e.g sit down to get dressed, use the elevator rather than stairs.
- Keep knees and ankles together when getting in/out of the car, bed, or a chair.
- If experiencing pelvic pain surrounding the buttock, trial a pillow between legs while sleeping.

Try: Bridges



Lower Back Pain

It is common to experience pain in your back during pregnancy. This will be influenced by the position of your baby, fatigue levels, and how strong you are.

Specific Tips:

- Ensure you move regularly throughout the day.
- Ensure you spend time both sitting, standing, and walking.
- Spend time doing a variety of stretching and strengthening exercises to support your back. See a physio for advice on which exercises would suit you best.



Try: Cat & Cow

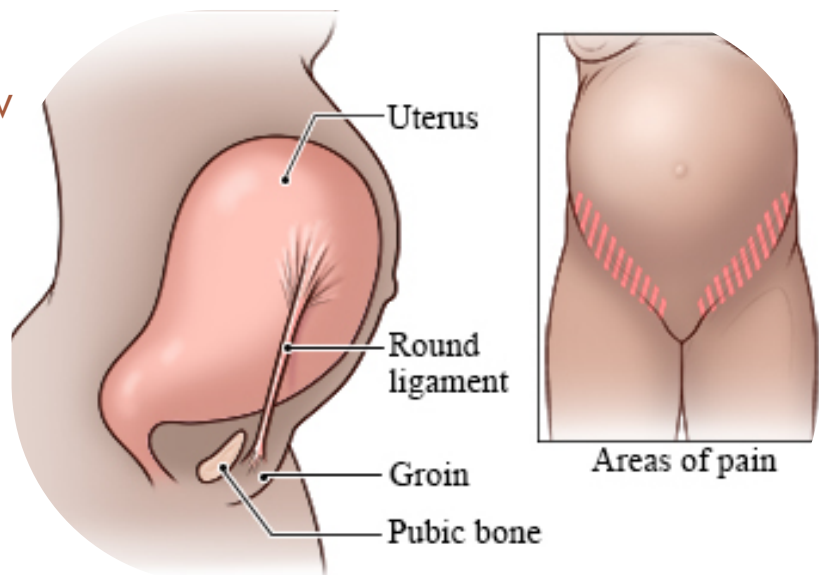


Round Ligament Pain

The round ligament connects your uterus in place and is made up of a combination of connective tissues, blood vessels, and small muscles. Through pregnancy, it thickens and stretches which can cause quick, sharp pains. You may notice it more when turning quickly or getting in and out of bed.

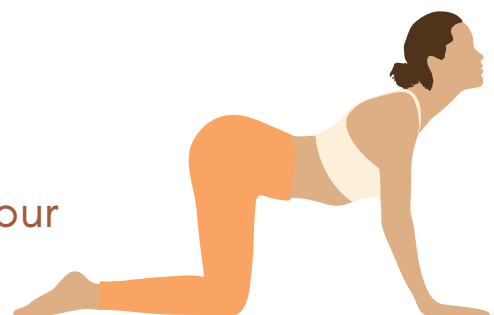
Specific Tips:

- Turn slowly when changing into new positions, especially as your baby grows heavier.
- Try wearing a support band or pregnancy shorts to support your growing belly.



Try: 4 Point Kneeling Abdominal Holds

- As you breath out, gentley draw your belly up towards your spine
- As you breath in, relax your belly



Upper Back Stiffness

Breast size will normally increase and become heavier throughout your pregnancy. This can increase the pressure on your upper back.

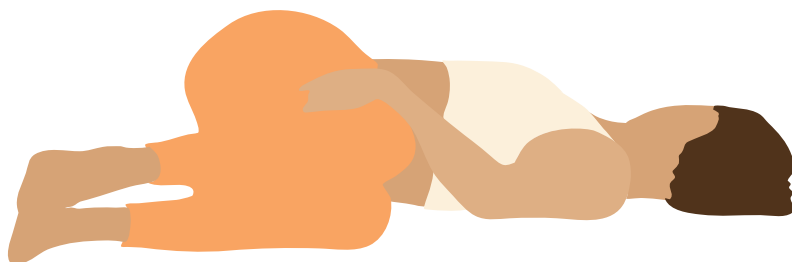
Specific Tips:

- Change positions regularly and include a variety of sitting and standing time through the day.
- Consider your posture when sitting for longer periods of time.



Try: Gentle Rotations

- In side-lying, slowly rotate your shoulders and upper back away from your knees



Birth Prep

A physiotherapist can help women prepare for birth by improving their understanding of their own anatomy and how this could influence their delivery and risk of future pelvic floor problems. We begin by asking you to investigate your family history. Did your mum or aunties have challenging deliveries? Do you have a family history of prolapse later in life?

In a birth preparation appointment, we will start by taking you through a detailed screening questionnaire. This will include questions on the bladder, bowel, and sexual health symptoms. These questions help guide our education, and your treatment experience.

We will then assess your abdominal wall and assess your pelvic floor via an internal examination. If you're uncomfortable with the idea of an internal assessment, you're not alone! We have alternative (external) assessment styles available, and we will go ahead at your pace.



Birth Prep

We will next discuss your goals, and what you're hoping to gain from your treatment sessions. Regardless of whether you're aiming to be a strong, functional mum or a marathon runner, we can help guide you through a personalised program to help you move well and prepare for your delivery.

Education will be a big part of your treatment experience. This will be tailored to your individual experience and will be organised based on your biggest bother. That is, a symptom or concern that's bothering you most. It's also a time for you to ask questions or clarify information.

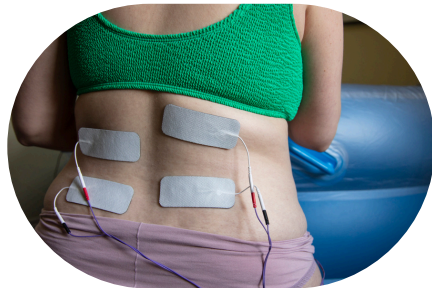
We want you to leave your appointment feeling empowered, understanding your body that little bit better, and knowing clearly what your next step is.



Pain Management

Birthing a baby is a painful business. As physiotherapists we can guide you through conservative pain management strategies. We encourage you to discuss with your obstetrician and midwifery team other medical strategies may be suitable to support your delivery and recovery.

Top Tips:



- **Breathwork**
- **TENS:** TENS stands for 'transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation'. It is a small box which is connected to adhesive pads by wires. An electrical current is directed to the skin via the adhesive pads. It works best when applied early in labour and can be easily hired from a variety of sources.
- **Active labour:** Moving around and changing positions through your labour is encouraged. Moving freely can help through contractions, and upright positions through labour uses gravity to help baby move downwards in the pelvis.
- **Water-based:** The use of a bath or hot shower through labour can help by easing tension through the lower back.
- **Distraction Techniques:** Music, lighting and affirmations can all be used as distraction techniques to assist through labour.

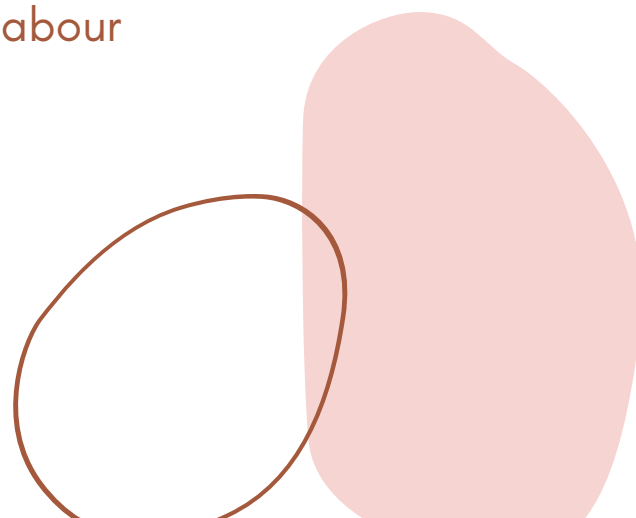


Protecting Your Pelvic Floor

You may find it strange (and perhaps scary) to have a section here on birthing injuries. As physiotherapists working in women's health, we believe it's important to help those in our care to be well informed and well prepared. It can be confronting to discuss potential injury. Know that your physio appointment is a safe space to bring up any fears or concerns you may have about pelvic floor injury during a delivery. There are different strategies to help reduce your risk and protect your pelvic floor through pregnancy and delivery. There are many other factors such as your anatomy, gestational diabetes, number of babies or size of baby's head that are outside of our control.

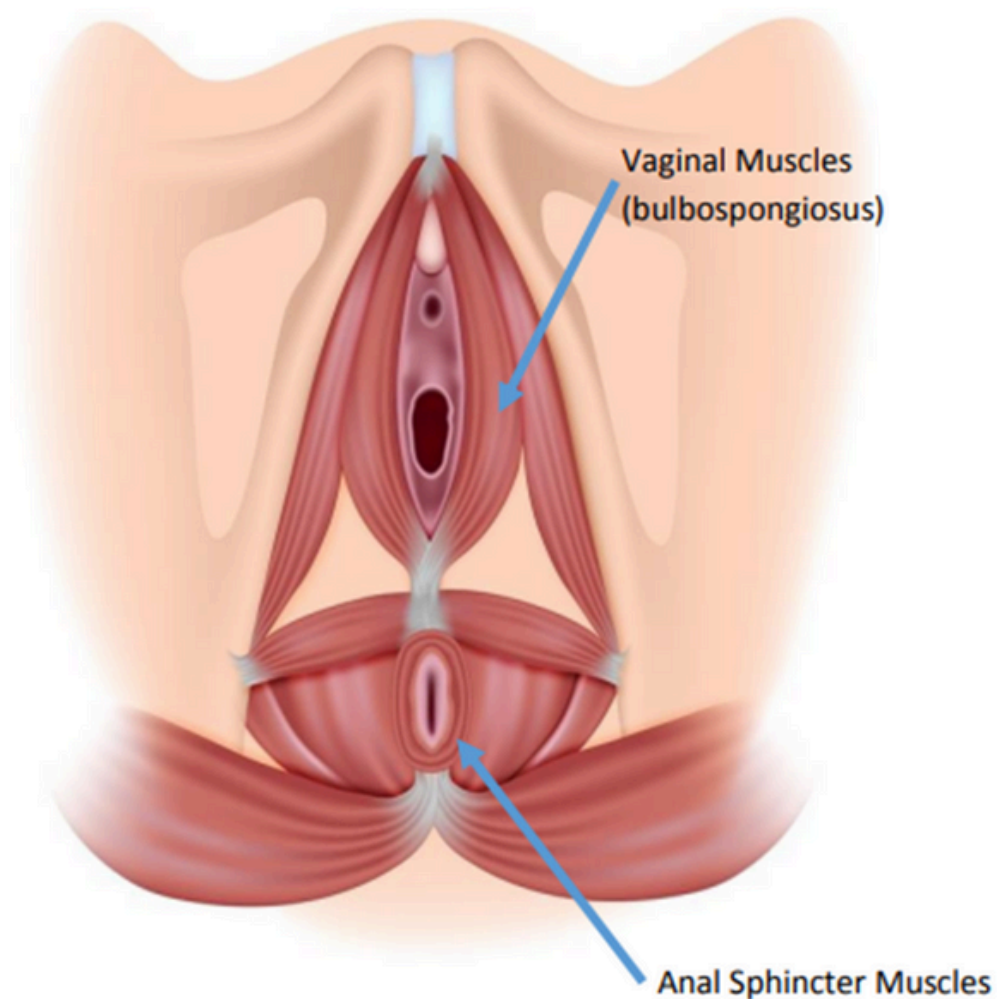
Top Tips to Care for Pelvic Floor

- Exercise regularly. This will help reduce your risk of gestational diabetes (ie big baby!) .
- Complete your own, personalised pelvic floor exercise program. Remember that this will look different for everyone.
- Perineal massage or Epi-No use after 34 weeks
- Use of a warm compress through labour
- Certain birthing positions through labour



Perineal Massage

Perineal massage is a technique used to reduce the risk of a perineal tear during birth. After 34 weeks of pregnancy, a woman or her partner can start massaging the perinium (the tissue between your vagina and anus). It is recommended that perineal massage is performed 3-4 times a week for 5 minutes in preparation for birth. In your physio appointment, we can teach you these techniques and ensure you and your partner are confident in knowing what to do.



Post-Natal Care

"I've just delivered my baby! What Next?"

Firstly, congratulations! This is an exciting time as your family grows. After having a baby, you will be cared for by the midwives and obstetricians in hospital. Once you are home there will be a large amount of natural healing in the first 8 weeks following delivery. This is the time frame where you get the biggest potential for change.

Top Tips:

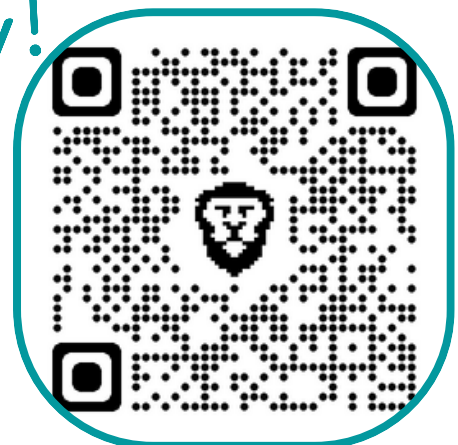
- **Gentle Walking:** Starting with 15 minute walks at a comfortable pace. Early walking has wonderful benefits not only for abdominal separation, but also for caesarean recovery, chest health and the pelvic floor. Try increasing your walks gradually by 5 minutes each week.
- **Abdominal Compression:** For example, you may be given tubi-grip at the hospital. Other options include SRC 'Recovery Shorts' and belly bands. Try wearing your abdominal support each day when you are up and moving to maximise the benefits.



Post-Natal Care

- **Pelvic Floor Care:** Your pelvic floor will need support after the delivery of a baby. Wearing recovery shorts and ensuring you spend plenty of time lying down in the first few weeks will help your pelvic floor to recover sooner.
- **Pelvic Floor Muscle Training:** You can begin pelvic floor exercises from 24 hours after giving birth – these should be gentle. A good cue to visualise is to imagine you're trying to hold in wind. You should feel a gentle squeeze and lift sensation. Try completing a 1 second hold x 10 repetitions each day in the first week. Each week, aim to add another second to your holds. For example, by the time your baby is 6 weeks old you could aim to complete a 6 second hold x 10 repetitions each day.
- **Post Natal Check:** Come and see us! We recommend all women attend a postnatal check 6 weeks following their delivery. We can perform a thorough assessment of your abdominal muscles and pelvic floor to help you become stronger sooner.

Book
Now!



Where to Next?

Below are some great resources to help you learn about your body and prepare for the delivery of your baby.

Podcasts:

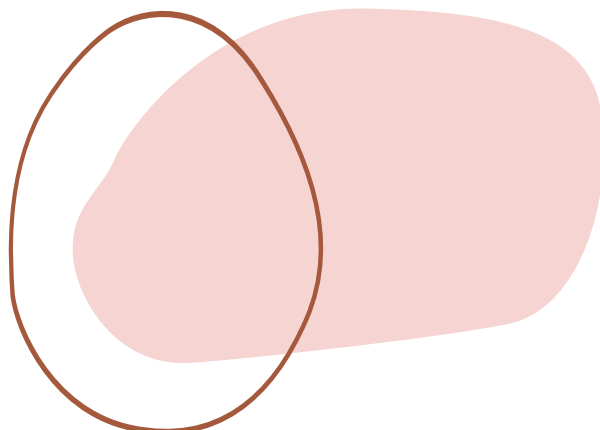
- Australian Birth Stories
- Inside the Box
- The Kick Pregnancy Podcast

Books:

- The Complete Australian Guide to Pregnancy and Birth (S. Walker, J. Wilson)
- Pelvic Floor Essentials (S. Croft)

Exercise Resources:

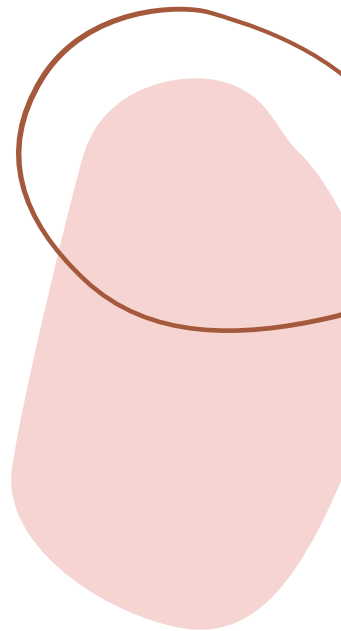
- The Empowered Motherhood Program: An online app that guides you week by week through different stretches and exercises. It is designed to help you move well through your pregnancy and support recovery postnatally.
- Discount code - PPSC10



Our Women's Health Team



Emily Standen & Grace Baker



My Goals for Pregnancy:



Womens Pelvic Health



Penrith
Physiotherapy
Sports Centre

G.Baker 2024





Womens Pelvic Health



Penrith
Physiotherapy
Sports Centre



Penrith: 119-121 Lethbridge Street

Kingswood: Suite 1A Barber Avenue

Web: www.penrithphysiotherapy.com.au



Call Today!

(02) 4721 5567