Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Exercises After Ostomy Surgery: Level 2

This information describes exercises you can do to help your body recover after you've had ostomy surgery. An exercise program focused on activating (using) your core will create a mind-body connection and strengthen your muscles. It will also help you move better.

Our ostomy exercise program has 2 parts. This is part 2. Your care team will tell you when it's safe to start doing these exercises. **Follow the instructions in *Exercises After Ostomy Surgery: Level 1* (www.mskcc.org/pe/ostomy-exercises-1) until your care team tells you it's safe to start these.**

What to do before you start this exercise program

Talk with your healthcare provider before you start this program. Your healthcare provider or rehabilitation (rehab) therapist may change the exercises to meet your needs.

Your care team will talk with you about movements to avoid while your incisions (surgical cuts) are healing. Follow their instructions. Contact them if you have any questions.

In general:

- **Do not lift or carry anything heavier than 10 pounds (4.5 kilograms) for 6 weeks after surgery.** For example, a 6-week-old baby, a full laundry basket, or a large trash bag often weighs more than 10 pounds. After 6 weeks, you can slowly start lifting and carrying heavier objects. Talk with your care team if you have any questions.

- **Avoid pushing or pulling moderate to heavy objects as much as you can for 6 weeks after surgery.** A full grocery cart or large garbage pail with trash in it are examples of moderate to heavy items. After 6 weeks, you can slowly start pushing and pulling heavier objects. Talk with your care team if you have any questions.
- **Do not do sit-ups, planks, pushups, or any strenuous exercise for 6 weeks after surgery.** A strenuous exercise is something that takes lots of energy or effort. These exercises can put extra stress on your abdominal (belly) muscles. Avoiding them will help prevent a hernia (bulging of an organ or tissue) through your incision or around your ostomy.

Talk with your Wound, Ostomy, and Continence (WOC) nurse after your surgery and during your post-op visit. They'll help you learn more about how to prevent a hernia around your stoma. Your stoma is the place on your abdomen (belly) where gas and poop will leave your body.

Exercise tips

- Wear your abdominal support binder when doing these exercises. Lie down to put it on. Your WOC nurse will teach you how to put it on.
- Dress for comfort. Wear clothing that will not limit your movements.
- For exercises you do lying down, support your head and shoulders with pillows, if needed. You can also bend your knees, put a pillow under your knees, or both. Make sure you're comfortable.
- For exercises you do while standing, keep your back straight and pull your belly button to your spine. This helps activate your abdominal muscles.
- Avoid holding your breath while doing any of these exercises. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Do the exercise movements when you breathe out. Count out loud during the exercises to keep your breaths evenly paced.
- **Stop doing any exercise that causes pain or discomfort.** Tell your healthcare provider or rehab therapist which exercise caused pain or discomfort. You can still do the other exercises.

Exercises

Your healthcare provider or rehab therapist will tell you how many times each day to do these exercises. Your physical therapist (PT) will show you how to do each exercise. Follow your care team's instructions.

These exercises will get easier as you do them regularly over time. When they get easier, tell your healthcare provider or rehab therapist. They will give you instructions for adjusting them so you can keep building your strength.

Diaphragmatic breathing

Diaphragmatic (DY-uh-fruh-MA-tik) breathing is an exercise that can relax your chest wall and abdominal muscles. Your diaphragm is a thin muscle that separates your chest from your belly.

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat. Place one or both of your hands over your belly.
2. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Your belly should rise, but your upper chest should stay still and relaxed.
3. Breathe out slowly through pursed lips, as if you're blowing out candles. As you breathe out, slowly and gently pull your belly towards your spine.

Repeat this movement 5 times. If your care team gives you different instructions, follow those instead.

Overhead chest wall stretch and 4-8-8 breathing

This stretch loosens your chest muscles and helps air move in and out of your lungs. This can bring more oxygen into your whole body.

1. Lie on your back, sit in a supportive chair, or stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Relax your arms at your sides.
    - If you're lying on your back, make sure you have enough room to raise your arms over your head.
    - If you're sitting or standing, make sure your back is straight and shoulders are back.
2. Breathe in for 4 seconds. As you do, slowly raise your arms out to the sides until they're over your head. Keep your elbows straight.
3. Hold your breath and keep your arms up for 8 seconds, if you can.
4. Breathe out through pursed lips (as if you're blowing out candles) for 8 seconds. As you do, slowly lower your arms back to your sides. Keep your elbows straight.
5. Relax for 1 to 2 seconds.

Repeat this movement 5 times. If your care team gives you different instructions, follow those instead.

Knee lifts with core (abdominal) activation

1. You can do this exercise while sitting or standing.
    - If you're sitting: Sit in a supportive chair. Move your feet so they're flat on the ground, under your knees. Your lower legs should be straight up and down, not at an angle.
    - If you're standing: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, shoulders back, and back straight. If you want extra support, place 1 hand on a nearby surface or wall. For even more stability and balance, you can stand with your back against a wall.
2. Place 1 hand on your upper belly. If you're not using your other hand for balance, place it on your lower belly. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Feel your belly rise and fall under your hands.
3. With your next breath out, gently pull your belly button towards your spine. You should feel your abdominal muscles contract (squeeze). Hold the contraction while you keep breathing.
4. Keeping your abdominal muscles contracted and your back straight, raise 1 knee. Remember to breathe.
    - If you're sitting, raise your knee to just above your hip level.
    - If you're standing, raise your knee to hip level.
5. Gently lower your foot back to the ground.
6. Repeat the movement with your other knee. Remember to breathe.

Repeat this movement 10 times for each knee. If your care team gives you different instructions, follow those instead.

Sitting, standing, or lying rotations with abdominal (core) activation

Sitting or standing rotations

1. Sit in a supportive chair or stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.
    - If you're standing and want extra stability and balance, place a chair on either side of you. When you turn to one side, lightly place both hands on the chair on that side for support.
2. Cross your arms and comfortably rest each hand on the opposite elbow.
3. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Feel your belly rise and fall. With your next breath out, gently pull your belly button towards your spine. You should feel your abdominal muscles contract. Hold the contraction while you keep breathing.
4. Keeping your abdominal muscles contracted and back straight, turn your arms, torso (trunk), and head to the left. Turn as far as you can without feeling discomfort. It's normal if this is only a few inches.
5. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Remember to keep breathing. After 5 seconds, turn back to facing forward.
6. Turn your arms, torso, and head to the right as far as you can without feeling discomfort. Remember to keep your abdominal muscles contracted and back straight.
7. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Remember to keep breathing. After 5 seconds, turn back to facing forward.

Repeat this movement 10 times toward each side. If your care team gives you different instructions, follow those instead.

Lying rotation

1. Lie on your back with your arms at your sides. Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the bed or ground, hip-width apart.
2. Gently tuck your tailbone and flatten your lower back to the ground. To tuck

your tailbone, imagine you're scooping your pelvis forward so your lower back is flat.

3. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Feel your belly rise and fall. With your next breath out, gently pull your belly button towards your spine. You should feel your abdominal muscles contract. Hold the contraction while you keep breathing. Keep your tailbone tucked.
4. Breathe gently. Rotate your knees and legs to the left as far as you can without feeling discomfort. It's normal for this to only be a few inches. Make sure to keep your upper body stable against the ground as you move your lower body.
5. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Remember to keep breathing. After 5 seconds, move your lower body back to the starting position.
6. Breathe gently and rotate your knees and legs to the right as far as you can without feeling discomfort. Remember to keep your upper body stable against the ground.
7. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Remember to keep breathing. After 5 seconds, move your lower body back to the starting position.

Repeat this movement 10 times toward each side. If your care team gives you different instructions, follow those instead.

Deadbug

1. Lie on your back with your arms at your sides. Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the bed or ground, hip-width apart.
2. Gently tuck your tailbone and flatten your lower back to the ground. To tuck your tailbone, imagine you're scooping your pelvis forward so your lower back is flat.
3. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Feel your belly rise and fall. With your next breath out, gently pull your belly button towards your spine. You should feel your abdominal muscles contract. Hold the contraction while you keep breathing. Keep your tailbone tucked.
4. Lift your left leg off the ground by straightening your knee. As you do, lift your right arm over your head. Remember to breathe.
5. Gently move your leg and arm back to the starting position.
6. Lift your right leg off the ground by straightening your knee. As you do, lift your left arm over your head. Remember to breathe.
7. Move back to the starting position.

Repeat this movement 10 times on each side. If your care team gives you different instructions, follow those instead.

Woodchopping

1. Sit in a supportive chair or stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Clasp your hands together over your left hip.
2. Twist your torso and lift your arms up to the right. End with your arms overhead over your right shoulder. Watch your hands as you move. Keep your hips stable and keep breathing.
3. Gently move your arms back to the starting position.
4. Move your hands so they're clasped over your right hip. Repeat the movement in the opposite direction, twisting your torso and lifting your arms up to the left. Remember to keep breathing and watch your hands as you move.
5. Move back to the starting position.

Repeat this movement 10 times toward each side. If your care team gives you different instructions, follow those instead.

Daily activities

Follow the instructions in *Safe Movements and Posture With an Ostomy: Instructions for People Who Can Sit* (www.mskcc.org/pe/ostomy-movements-can-sit) as you do your daily activities. Most people can do all their normal activities, such as:

- Vacuuming
- Sweeping
- Cooking
- Sitting at a computer

Ask your healthcare provider if there are any daily activities you should not do.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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