

# Abdominal & core

recovery + movement  
programme

me + recovery

Helping you to recover, one step at a time

**GREEN** PHASE ONE: Foundation

**BLUE** PHASE TWO: Making Progress

# Safe Moving



Watch our video at [www.convatec.co.uk/meplus](http://www.convatec.co.uk/meplus) on how to get in and out of bed safely.



Sit on the side of your bed and slowly lower yourself down sideways using your arm for support.



Then slowly bring your legs up to the bed one by one.



Lower yourself down so you're lying on your side, then roll over onto your back.



## YOUR RECOVERY

These movements are appropriate for anyone who has just had major abdominal surgery.

They form a very important part of your early recovery after stoma surgery and everyone is advised to do them.

Do them very gently and listen to your body carefully. If you experience pain or an unexpected response then stop the movement and speak to your nurse or surgeon.

**If your wounds have not healed properly or you have an infection, then please do not commence this programme and speak to your surgeon or nurse about when you should start.**

There are a number of movements in this programme; some of which you can do lying in bed (or on the floor at home), others are done

sitting in your chair or standing up.

Make sure you're safe and not at risk of falling when you do the movements and that your chair or bed is secure.

## SAFE MOVING

After abdominal surgery it's very important to get in and out of bed in a safe way to avoid straining your abdominal area. Try to avoid 'sitting up' using your abdomen. Instead roll onto your side and push up sideways to a sitting position. To lie back down, lower yourself onto your side and then roll onto your back.

If you're getting up from and down onto the floor, try a similar technique and use a chair for support.

## WATCH THE INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS FOR THESE MOVES AT [www.convatec.co.uk/meplus](http://www.convatec.co.uk/meplus)

Your core muscles are very important, they support your spine and internal organs and are involved in every movement that you do. Your 'core' is made up of abdominal muscles, but also muscles in your back and pelvic floor. Think of your 'core' as your inbuilt support.

During abdominal surgery your muscles become weak and damaged, so it's very important to begin to gently strengthen them as soon as you can after surgery. This will help your recovery, posture and confidence as well as reducing your risk of developing complications due to inactivity.

**PLEASE NOTE:** This programme has been developed in conjunction with nurses, physiotherapists, surgeons and stoma patients. All the movements are appropriate for someone who has had major abdominal surgery. If you have any questions about any of the movements, please speak to your nurse, surgeon, GP or physiotherapist. Always listen to your body and proceed with care. If you have any pain, discomfort or an unusual or unexpected response when doing the movements then please stop and seek medical advice.

# Abdominal & core recovery programme

## Foundation

### WHAT ARE THE AIMS?

- To enhance your recovery and get you back to your daily activities as soon as possible
- To rebuild your confidence and improve your general wellbeing after abdominal surgery
- To help restore your mobility, co-ordination and balance
- To engage and strengthen your tummy muscles after abdominal surgery

### HOW DOES IT WORK?

- With the approval of your surgeon, you can start these recovery movements as soon as 1-3 days after your operation, or as soon as you feel ready
- Everyone should start with this green phase (even if your surgery was years ago) and complete it before moving onto the blue phase. It's important to take your time and not rush through it
- If you can, follow this programme BEFORE surgery. It will help you to recover faster afterwards
- This programme is a menu. You don't have to do ALL the movements. Pick and choose the ones that feel right for you
- These movements can be done on your bed or on the floor



It is imperative that you check with your nurse, physiotherapist or surgeon before commencing this programme. Show them this booklet and ask them to support you through it.



## Core Connect



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
- Gently place your hands on your lower tummy.
- Take a breath in. Then slowly breathe out through your mouth. As you breathe out, tighten up your internal abdominal muscles including your pelvic floor.
- Focus on the feeling of pulling your tummy away from your hands. Imagine trying to pull your hip bones together as if you're closing a book.
- You're aiming to get a deep contraction of the muscle. Nothing should visibly move on the outside of your body. It is very subtle and gentle.
- Hold this gentle contraction for a slow count of 3-5 whilst continuing to breathe normally.
- Then relax and breathe away.
- Repeat x 5
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 2 Pelvic Tilt



- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Relax with a slight curve in your lower back – this is the neutral position.
- Breathe out and gently flatten your lower back into the bed/floor - rocking your pelvis backwards, taking the curve out of your back. Imagine trying to squash a pea under your low back.
- At the same time gently contract your deep abdominal muscles and your pelvic floor.
- Try not to push on your legs, just tilt the pelvis. You're simply taking the curve out of your lower back.
- Hold this position for a moment.
- Then release back to the neutral position and relax.
- Repeat x 5
- Do this 2-3 times per day
- As you get stronger, you'll be able to hold a stronger contraction and tilt/hold for a little longer.

## 3 Knee Rolls



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet together.
- Relax and breathe normally.
- Then gently tighten your deep tummy muscles as previously.
- Allow your knees to roll over to one side, keeping your shoulders flat on the floor. Keep your knees and ankles stacked together.
- Only go over as far as is comfortable, then come back to centre and allow your knees to drop over to the opposite side.
- This is a gentle rolling side-to-side action, moving gently with control from one side to the other. You should feel your tummy muscles working gently as you roll your knees back up.
- Consciously breathe out as you bring your knees back to the centre and use your abdominal muscles to assist the movement.
- Repeat x 10
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 4 Seated Arm Raises



- Sit on the side of your bed or on your chair, making sure you're secure and safe with your feet firmly on the floor.
- Relax and breathe and have your hands by your sides.
- Focus on contracting your deep abdominal muscles and pelvic floor. Maintain this strong contraction throughout.
- Sit nice and tall with good posture and imagine a balloon on the top of your head.
- With a straight arm. Slowly raise one arm out in front of you. Go as high as you feel able. Keep your shoulder down and relaxed. If you can, take your arm above your head.
- Swap to the other side and repeat. Alternate arms, maintaining control of your deep abdominal muscles throughout.
- Continue to breathe throughout and keep your tummy muscles engaged.
- Repeat x 10 in total
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 5 Seated Knee Lifts



- Sit on the side of your bed or on your chair, making sure you're secure and safe with your feet firmly on the floor.
- Sit towards the front of the chair so your back is not supported. This makes the movement more effective.
- Relax and breathe and place both hands on your knees.
- Sit nice and tall with good posture – imagine a balloon lifting you up from the crown of your head.
- Focus on contracting your deep abdominal muscles and pelvic floor. Maintain this strong contraction throughout.
- Slowly lift one foot off the floor to challenge your abdominal control. Only a tiny lift. Imagine sliding a letter under your foot. The focus is on maintaining the abdominal contraction.
- Replace your foot on the floor and repeat on the other side – maintain control of your trunk and don't allow any movement from side to side of your upper body.
- Continue to breathe normally throughout
- Repeat x 10 in total
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 6 Standing Rocking



- Stand with your feet together, as tall as you can and engage and contract your deep abdominal muscles and pelvic floor.
- Step forward with one foot so that your heel is in line with the toes on your opposite foot.
- Balance your weight between both feet.
- Keep your abdominal muscles engaged throughout.
- Slowly rock forwards and backwards – transferring your weight from foot to foot.
- Allow your heel to lift as you rock forwards and the toe of the other foot to lift as you rock backwards.
- This is a very gentle balance and core engagement movement.
- Aim to do 10 rocking movements with good control.
- Swap your feet over and do 10 on the opposite side.
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 7 Supported Sit to Stand



- Sit close to the front of your chair or on the side of your bed with your feet firmly on the floor, feet should be shoulder distance apart or in an 'offset' position with one in front of the other.
- Have something to support you such as the arms of the chair or another support close by.
- Try to use your legs as much as you can in this movement.
- First, gently tighten your deep tummy muscles as previously.
- Take a deep breath in, then as you breathe out, push yourself up to a standing position. Using the power of the breath to help you. Use your support as needed, but try not to rely on it. Avoid pushing down hard on the arms of the chair and don't hold your breath.
- When standing, stand tall - pause and take a breath.
- Then slowly (with control) lower yourself back down to sitting – try to use the muscles in your legs – try to avoid flopping back down without control.
- Take a breath, and repeat.
- Repeat x 5-10
- Do this 2-3 times per day

# Abdominal & core

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**BLUE** PHASE TWO: Making Progress

# Abdominal & core recovery programme

## Making Progress

When you've been working through Green Phase 1 for a few weeks and you feel confident with the moves, you're ready to move onto **Blue Phase 2**.

There is no set timeframe for how long to spend on each phase. Much will depend on your condition, recovery and previous wellbeing. Only progress when you are ready and can complete all of the Green Phase 1 moves easily and comfortably.

- Blue Phase 2 forms the main ongoing recovery and movement programme. It is designed for people who have had major abdominal surgery and the formation of a stoma. There are 12 moves in total but you do not have to do them all.
- Simply choose the ones you feel most comfortable with. You could pick 3-4 moves and vary them throughout the week.
- Just try to make sure you do something every day – little and often is best.

- Of course if you want to do them all every day then that's fine, just listen to your body and rest when you need to.
- Your muscles shouldn't hurt or become too sore. If they do, then do fewer of the exercises or take more rest in between.

### STANDING ALTERNATIVES

- If you find it hard to get onto the floor or you can't kneel, then try doing the lying moves in bed, or just choose standing or sitting moves.

### GETTING DOWN ONTO THE FLOOR

- If you want to do some of these moves on the floor, make sure you get down onto the floor and back up safely to avoid straining your abdomen.
- Avoid 'sitting up' hard or pulling on your abdomen.
- Use a chair or bed as support and get down onto the floor in a step by step fashion, kneeling first, then onto your hands and knees and slowly over onto your back.

Remember, you don't have to do all the movements in this programme. Do the ones that you feel comfortable with and the ones you feel you need most



## Core Connect with Knee Drops



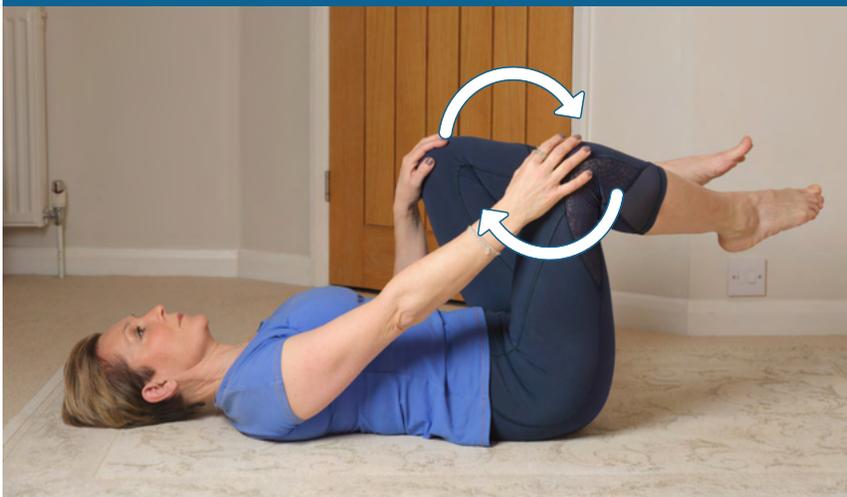
- Lie on your back with your knees bent, and feet flat on the floor/bed.
- Gently contract your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and maintain this contraction throughout.
- Hold this contraction whilst continuing to breathe normally.
- Then (keeping your knee bent) slowly allow one knee to drop out to one side then slowly return it to centre.
- Only go as far as you can. As soon as you feel that you start to lose control of your pelvis, bring your knee back to centre.
- Keep your pelvis very stable and try to avoid any movement. Imagine having a spirit level across your hipbones and you need to stop the bubble from moving.
- The goal is NOT to see how low you can get your knee, it is more important to do this with control, even if you just move a small amount.
- Then repeat with the opposite leg.
- Repeat x 10 in total on each side
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 2 Core Connect with Leg Slides



- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Gently contract your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and maintain this contraction throughout.
- Hold this contraction - whilst continuing to breathe normally.
- Then slowly straighten your leg, sliding your heel along the floor/bed away from you. As you slide your leg away, breathe out. Then breathe in to return your leg to the starting point. Repeat on the other side.
- Keep your tummy muscles tight and maintain control.
- Keep your pelvis very stable and try to avoid any movement. Imagine having a spirit level across your hipbones and you need to stop the bubble from moving.
- Pull your leg back in and repeat on the other side. Keep the movement slow and controlled.
- Repeat x 5-10 with each leg
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 3 Core Connect with Knee Circles



- Lie on your back and carefully bring your knees - one at a time - up to your chest.
- Gently contract your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and maintain this contraction throughout.
- Place your hands on your kneecaps, relax your shoulders and breathe normally.
- Keeping your tummy muscles contracted, make a VERY slow controlled small circle with your right knee.
- Don't allow your body to move. Keep everything controlled and still. The only thing moving is your knee.
- Try and get the movement as perfect as you can. This will usually take a lot of concentration. As soon as you feel loss of control simply make the circles smaller or take a rest.
- Repeat x 5 and then do 5 in the opposite direction. Then change legs.
- When you've completed the movement, carefully return your feet to the floor one at a time.
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 4 Hip Lift Bridge



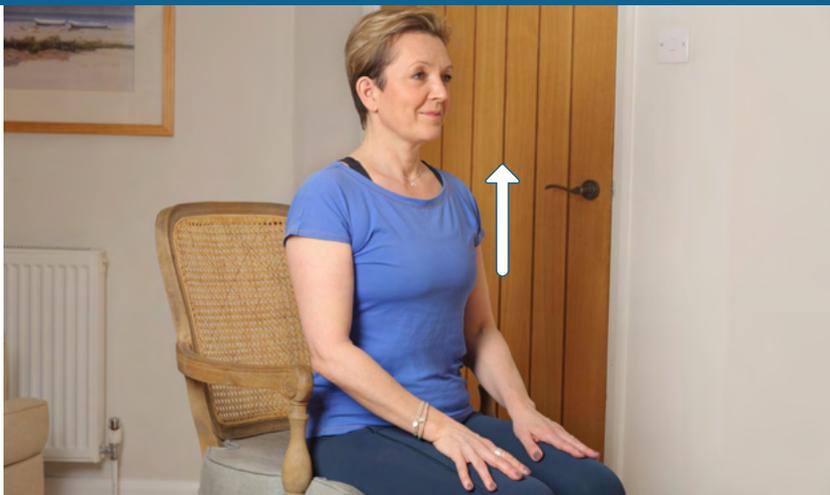
- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Gently contract your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and maintain this contraction throughout.
- Gently flatten your lower back into the floor, squashing an imaginary pea under your low back. Imagine rolling a marble into your navel and up onto your chest. As your pelvis tilts, your bottom will start to lift off the floor.
- Continue to lift your bottom (vertebrae by vertebrae) until you're in a 'bridge' position with your bottom lifted. Only go as high as you feel comfortable.
- Avoid pressing through your legs or arms.
- Keep the movement very slow and controlled.
- Hold the position at the top - tighten your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and then slowly lower back to the floor - keeping the muscles engaged the whole time. It is important to keep control of the movement and to keep breathing normally throughout.
- When your bottom is back on the floor, allow your abdominal muscles to relax completely & breathe normally, then repeat.
- Repeat x 5-10
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 5 Hamstring Stretch



- Place your hands on the seat of a chair (if you find this too low, then start with your hands on the back of the chair or on the kitchen counter).
- Have your toes facing forwards and legs straight – feet should be shoulder distance apart.
- Slowly push your bottom backwards (away from your hands) until you feel a 'tension' down the backs of your legs. Hold this for 20-30 seconds and keep breathing. You should feel the tension start to relax. Keep your legs straight and your shoulders relaxed and down.
- Repeat this stretch as often as you like. Remember to keep breathing throughout and keep your arms and shoulders relaxed.
- Repeat x 10-15
- Do this 2-3 x per day

## 6 Sitting Squeezes



- Sit nice and tall on a hard chair with your feet on the floor.
- Tighten your bottom muscles by clenching your bottom cheeks firmly together.
- You should feel that you lift up off the chair.
- Don't press with your legs – it's just your bottom muscles doing the work.
- Hold for a count of 2 and then release – and repeat.
- Repeat x 10
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 7 Rotations



- Sit upright nice and tall on a chair or the side of your bed.
- Clasp your hands together and place them under your chin. Keep your arms tucked in at your ribs/waist.
- Keep your shoulders down and relaxed and your bottom fixed on the chair.
- Slowly rotate through your spine to one side until you feel you can't go any further. It's a bit like a corkscrew.
- Keep your pelvis fixed in position and try to rotate through your mid back.
- Then switch and rotate to the other side.
- Keep this fluid rotating movement going as you slowly repeat it from side to side.
- Start with 10 and build up to doing 20-30 repetitions
- Do this 2-3 times per day



## Self Massage Technique 1 Low Back, Hips and Glutes



### BALL ON WALL TECHNIQUE

- Position a massage ball (tennis ball will do, but preferably some sort of specific massage ball which is firmer) between your bottom and the wall.
- Position your legs wide and knees bent – with your feet a little way from the wall. Make sure you're safe and can't slip.
- Gently press the ball into the wall with your bottom muscles. Slowly move from side to side and up and down to massage any tight or sore areas.
- Hunt out 'tight spots' where you might feel more tender. When you find one, hold the pressure on that point for 10 seconds.
- Remember to keep breathing and stay relaxed.
- You can do this any time and as often as you wish. Aim to do 1-2 minutes of massage on each side.



## Self Massage Technique 2 Low Back, Hips and Glutes



### BALL ON FLOOR TECHNIQUE: HIPS/BOTTOM MUSCLES

- You can also use the massage ball into your bottom muscles in the same way.
- Lie on your side propped up on your elbow.
- Position the ball in the side of your hip or bum muscles.
- Simply sit/lie on the ball (in a side lying position) and allow the ball to massage the tight areas.
- You'll feel where you need it most.
- Relax and breathe and gently move it around working through the 'hot spots' of tightness.
- Try 1-2 minutes each day



## Slow Marching



- Stand with good posture holding onto a chair or support.
- Gently contract your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and maintain this contraction throughout.
- Slowly peel one foot off the floor lifting your knee and then the other knee in a slow marching action.
- Only lift your feet as high as you feel you can (you might only peel your toe off the floor to begin with).
- Keep your pelvis stable and abdominal muscles engaged throughout.
- The key is to maintain control and keep the move slow.
- Start with 10 slow marches and progress to 20-30 as you get stronger.

## 10 Pelvic Tilt in Standing



- Place your hands on a table or kitchen work surface.
- Have your feet slightly apart and bend your knees a little.
- Then gently contract your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles.
- Tuck your bottom under - rounding out your lower back. This is a very gentle pelvic tilt.
- Tighten your tummy muscles again, then release your pelvis back to a neutral position and relax.
- This movement is VERY small and very gentle.
- Think subtle, slow, controlled and gentle pelvic rocking movement. If you get any discomfort in your back during or after doing this exercise, then stop and do the pelvic tilt (lying down) move instead.
- Repeat x 10
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 11 Calf Raises



- Stand upright as tall as you can, and hold onto a chair or support.
- Gently contract your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and maintain this contraction throughout.
- Slowly raise up onto your toes - imagine a balloon on top of your head is pulling you up to the ceiling.
- Lower back down so your heels are on the floor and repeat.
- Keep your legs straight without bending your knees.
- Imagine you are standing inside a tube and you are going up and down inside. Try to avoid leaning forward and resting on your hands.
- You'll feel your calf muscles working as you do this.
- Repeat x 5-10 (build up to 20)
- Do this 2-3 times per day

## 12 Hip Stretch



- Place one foot on a low step or seat of a chair.
- Keep your other leg relaxed behind you with your toes facing forwards.
- From this position, simply 'tuck' your pelvis under so you feel a stretch on the front of your thigh. Hold that position.
- From here slowly lunge forwards (bending your front knee) maintaining the pelvic tuck position.
- You should feel an increasing (but gentle) stretch through the front of your hip and thigh of your straight leg.
- Return to your start position and repeat.
- It's a very gentle subtle movement. Try to do this as a flowing dynamic mobility movement rather than holding a static stretch position.
- Repeat x 5-10 on each side
- Do this x 2-3 per day

WELL DONE FOR COMPLETING PHASE 2  
NOW IT'S TIME TO MOVE TO PHASE 3.



**convatec**  
— forever caring —



**recovery**

ACPGBI accreditation and Bord Altranais CEU points



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