

Your Guide to Recovery

After Ostomy Surgery

The information in this handbook is not intended to provide medical advice. You should speak with your health care professional before engaging in physical activity following ostomy surgery. In the event you experience pain or discomfort, stop the activity immediately and contact your health care professional.



answers
recovery series



Welcome to



answers

recovery series

If you've ever had ostomy surgery, currently have an ostomy or have had a reversal, then me+™ recovery is for you.

In the early days after your operation, there's a lot to come to terms with, and it can be a difficult and challenging time. But having an ostomy doesn't have to stop you from living a completely normal and healthy life.

In fact, many people with ostomies are surprised at just how well they adapt and in many cases their quality of life improves. The me+ recovery series is designed to guide you – step by step – through your recovery after your operation and beyond. It will help restore your confidence to live life with an ostomy to the fullest; from working, traveling, having children or any kind of physical activity or sport that you want.

This handbook provides you with the most up-to-date advice about your recovery over the weeks, months and years to come. But please don't feel overwhelmed. Just take your time; we're here for you every step of the way.

This handbook is not meant to provide definitive advice and is for guidance only. If you have any concerns, please consult your ostomy nurse or doctor.

The materials in this booklet are adapted from the me+ recovery nurse training course which is RCN (Royal College Nursing) and ACPGGI (Association Coloproctology GB and Ireland) accredited in the UK and have undergone extensive peer and expert review.

Peer Reviewed by: Prof Sina Dorudi, Consultant Colorectal Surgeon, Mike Grice, Osteopath, Lecturer Sports Therapy and Module Leader for Athletic Movement Analysis, Dr Iseult Wilson, Institute of Nursing and Health Research





"When I went through emergency surgery for an ostomy in 2010, I found very little advice about physical activity and rehabilitation. Prior to my operation, I'd been a competitive runner, but I remember being completely floored by the surgery."

-Sarah, *Living with an ostomy since 2010*

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

I lost all my confidence both physically and mentally. Luckily I had the knowledge from my previous training to rehabilitate my body, to get my abdominal muscles strong again and to get back on my feet. But not everyone is that fortunate. The more I talked to other people the more I found that most people had a similar experience as me. Too many people seem to be scared about doing physical activity or exercise and worried about doing themselves harm, when in fact there are so many benefits to being active.

At ConvaTec we are passionate about helping you live your life to the fullest and so – alongside other healthcare experts – we've developed the me+™ recovery series.

For me, getting active again after my surgery helped me rebuild my confidence and self-esteem and it gave me a sense of control over what had happened to me. Your ostomy doesn't need to be a barrier, it's really just a challenge which you can overcome and the me+ recovery series is the first step to helping you do just that.

Best wishes,

Sarah Russell

Sarah Russell, BSc and MSc Sport Science
Clinical Exercise Specialist



To read more of Sarah's story, visit: mepluscommunity.com



"I would have loved to have had a series like this as it would have given me so much more confidence and structure to my recovery." - Maria*

**Model portrayal for illustrative purposes only.*

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE **PLANNED SURGERY**

As you wait for your operation, staying active with some gentle regular movement, brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming or any other activity you currently enjoy is really important. This may help your mental well-being if you're feeling a bit anxious. Check with your doctor about what is appropriate for you. If possible, try to work through the Green Phase 1 exercises to help strengthen your abdominal muscles prior to surgery.

me+TM RECOVERY DIARY

The me+ recovery series diary will help you track your progress after surgery. It is available to download and print at www.meplusrecovery.com.

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YOUR RECOVERY – IT'S IN YOUR HANDS

Remember, everyone is different and it's important to listen to your body and be guided by how you feel.

Try to be patient and don't expect too much of yourself too soon. It can take a number of weeks for the surgical site and tissue to fully heal^[1]. However, during that recovery period you can help your recovery by beginning to take part in some gentle activity and movements. Follow the movement series, starting with Green Phase 1 which you can start within a few days after your surgery.

It is likely to take many months for your body to fully recover from the surgery and the illness that led to your ostomy. So just take your time and be patient.

Depending on the condition that led to your ostomy in the first place, you may also have significant weight loss or gain, additional complications, cancer treatment, other surgical

sites and malnutrition, plus general aches and pains associated with bed rest and surgery.

Be guided by your surgeon, doctor or ostomy nurse on how your individual medical condition affects your recovery.

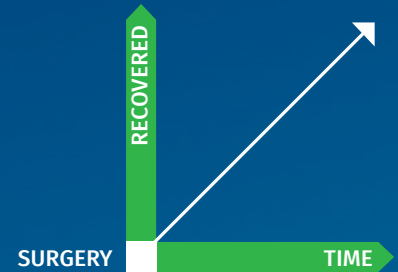
Doing a small amount of activity and some 'recovery' exercises may help you feel more confident and make a really positive difference to your well-being and recovery.

Appropriate activities in the early recovery phase might include:

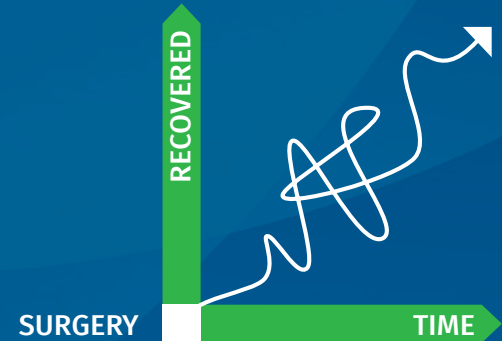
- Walking
- Gentle core and abdominal 'movements'
- Mobility, balance and coordination exercises

Balance this with appropriate amounts of sleep and rest; which your body needs to recover.

What you think it will be like



WHAT IT REALLY WILL BE LIKE





"As a colorectal surgeon, I'm only too aware of how challenging ostomy surgery is for my patients. But I also know how important it is for them to make a full physical recovery and to return to their normal lives."

– Professor Sina Dorudi, *Consultant Colorectal Surgeon*



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LIFTING AND MOVING SAFELY^[2]

In the early weeks after surgery you need to be careful with any lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling movements. Avoid lifting heavy or particularly awkward items^[3]. This can cause strain to your abdomen.

- Lifting safely is very important, even with relatively 'light' items such as a gallon of milk or a shopping bag.
- Try to 'breathe out' as you lift and make sure you lift with good technique, holding the object close to your body.
- Any pushing, twisting or pulling movements need to be done with caution. In particular things like vacuuming and mowing the lawn can place strain on your abdomen and you may choose to avoid them for the first few weeks.
- If you have a dog, be careful that it doesn't pull on the lead and strain your abdominal area.
- Be cautious with physical housework and gardening for the first few weeks and then gradually build-up your daily activities as you feel ready.



POSTURE^[2]



"It's really important to listen to your body. It knows when it needs to rest, so do what it tells you." - Jo

After abdominal surgery it's common to slump or stoop over to protect your abdomen, especially if you're in pain. This can cause low back pain or other aches and pains, so although it's hard, try to adopt a more upright posture and think about 'standing tall'.

This will also help your breathing as well as encouraging your abdominal muscles to function normally again.

Imagine you have a balloon on the top of your head and it's lifting you gently up through your spine. At the same time, breathe deeply and exhale and relax.

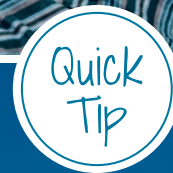
Try to adopt this tall posture when walking, standing and moving around. Just being aware of it will make a big difference.

BREATHING AND RELAXATION^[4]

Simple breathing techniques can help you to relax, improve healing and reduce anxiety. Deep breathing encourages you to use your lungs properly, particularly after abdominal surgery.

Try the following breathing technique at any time before or after your surgery:

1. Sit upright in a chair with your back well supported or propped up in bed.
2. Relax.
3. First - take 3 full breaths - exhaling fully out of your mouth.
4. Then close your eyes.
5. Place one hand on your abdomen (just below belly button).
6. Place the other hand on your breastbone.
7. **STEP 1 - Breathe in gently through your nose;** you should feel your belly move outward towards your hand.
8. **STEP 2 -** Then continue to breathe in, you should feel the hand on your breastbone move up and away.
9. **STEP 3 -** Keep breathing in and allow your shoulders to rise up towards your ears as the top of your lung fills.
10. Then slowly breathe out through your mouth. As you exhale, lower your shoulders, feel your side ribs move in and down and your belly pull softly inwards and away from your hand. Imagine your body is an umbrella and you're closing it down.
11. Pause and repeat 2-3 times.



Slow deep breathing can help you to relax and manage pain after your operation.

Close your eyes and breathe in slowly for a count of 4, then exhale for a count of 4.

Repeat as often as needed.

WALKING – GETTING BACK ON YOUR FEET^[2]



"I love climbing, cycling and being out on the wild Scottish mountains. Why would I let my stoma prevent me from having so much fun?"

- Billy, (Model portrayal for illustrative purposes only.)

When you're in the hospital the physical therapist or nurse will get you out of bed to start doing some short walks soon after your surgery. By the time you leave the hospital you should be doing longer walks around the hospital unit a few times per day and it's important to continue to do this when you get back home^[5].

Walking is one of the best things you can do in the recovery period. It will help to boost your confidence, rebuild your muscles and help your recovery^[6].

- **When you're back at home**, gradually build up the time you can walk for.
- **Start** with short 5-10 minute walks twice a day.
- **Stay close to home** and just walk around the block. It's much better to do 'little and often' rather than try to push it too far.
- **Then as you get stronger** you can increase the distance bit by bit. You could set a goal to get to the next lamppost or the mailbox.
- **Take a friend** or partner with you for support and don't go too far from home to begin with.

- **Walk with good posture**, keeping your head up – imagine a balloon on the top of your head pulling you up towards the sky.
- **Wear comfortable supportive shoes**, ideally sneakers or lace up shoes.
- **Plan your walk so you can rest afterwards** and take pain medication just before you go. Take a mobile phone with you.
- **Within just a few weeks**, you'll be able to walk farther and should be able to walk for 30-40 minutes.
- **Go at your own pace** but don't be afraid to try a little more each time.
- **Get a pedometer** or use your smartphone to track your daily step count. Then work on gradually increasing it as you get stronger and fitter.



PELVIC FLOOR^[2.7]

Your pelvic floor is a very important group of muscles. Your pelvic floor supports your pelvic organs which include your bladder, rectum and uterus, is part of your 'core' group of muscles and acts like a sling of muscle at the bottom of your pelvis.

A well-functioning pelvic floor is essential for bowel and bladder control as well as organ support, even if you have an ostomy, and it's important for both men and women^[8].

If your ostomy is temporary and you're planning a reversal, an efficient pelvic floor will be essential to maintain bowel and bladder control after your ostomy is reversed.

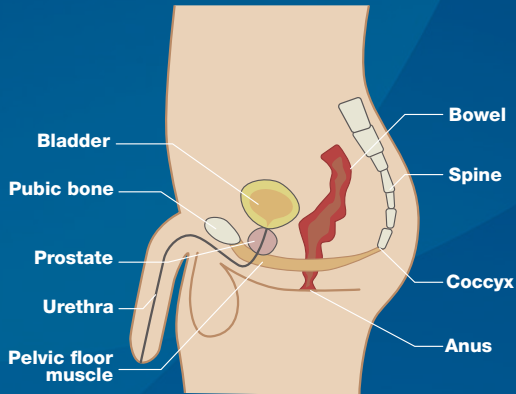
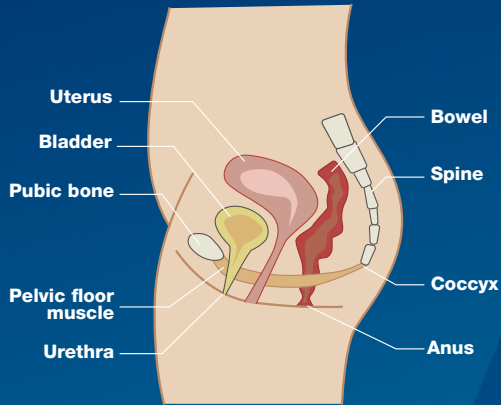
So it's really important to do some pelvic floor training to prepare for your reversal operation.

If your ostomy is permanent, good pelvic floor health is important for posture, continence and support of your other internal organs.

Pelvic floor training is important for everyone, so these movements are included in this section of the handbook as everyone is advised to do them.

Do these movements before (if possible) and after your ostomy operation, before your reversal (if appropriate) and throughout your life.

With your medical professional's permission, you can begin them as soon as you feel able after your operation.



HOW TO STRENGTHEN YOUR PELVIC FLOOR

Start doing these movements lying on your back either in bed or on the floor. This position makes it easier to 'find' the muscles and feel them working. Eventually you should be able to do your pelvic floor exercises while sitting or standing.

1. Lie down on your back with your knees bent and relax.
2. Imagine you're trying to close the opening to your vagina, anus or urethra (for men – try to get the feeling that you're gently pulling your testicles up into your body or stopping yourself from passing gas) and tighten up the muscles of your pelvic floor.
3. Visualize trying to 'lift' your pelvic floor up inside your body. That you're lifting the muscle and drawing it up inside – like you're pulling a drawstring bag closed or trying to stop yourself from going to the toilet or passing gas. Even if you have an ostomy you should still be able to get this feeling.
4. It might be hard to get the feeling initially, but it's very subtle and gentle, so keep trying.
5. Hold the 'lift and tighten' feeling for a count of 5-10 seconds, breathe normally then gently release and allow your pelvic floor to fully relax. Breathe and concentrate on relaxing and letting the muscles go.

6. Nothing should visibly move on the outside – so try to avoid clenching your bottom or holding your breath. You are working on 'internal' muscles, so no one should be able to tell that you're doing them.
7. Repeat 5-10 times and do this 2-3 times per day.
8. Initially post op (depending on the type of surgery you've had) this may be uncomfortable or especially difficult – particularly if you have had extensive surgery, **so just try out a short gentle squeeze to begin with and as you get better you should be able to manage a stronger contraction.**
9. In time you should be able to do this when sitting or standing, so you can do it many times per day.

I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING. AM I DOING SOMETHING WRONG?

It can be hard to get the feeling of this initially, but keep trying until you start to feel you can get a 'lift' and 'tightening' of your pelvic floor. If you feel a 'bulge' rather than a 'lift', please stop and get advice from a physical therapist. If you still can't feel anything or have more specific problems with incontinence, then please ask to be referred to a medical professional.

With your doctor's permission, you can begin these exercises as soon as you feel able after your operation.



PARASTOMAL HERNIA^[9]

You may have heard about a complication known as a 'parastomal' hernia

This is an abnormal bulge around the stoma, where an extra loop of bowel squeezes through between the stoma and abdominal wall – and sits between the skin and the muscle of the abdominal wall. They can affect up to 50% of patients within one year following creation of the stoma^[9].

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE YOUR RISK:

Manage your weight. Being overweight is one of the biggest causes of parastomal hernia as it causes intra-abdominal pressure to push on the abdominal wall. So try to maintain a healthy weight and if you're overweight, try to lose weight.

Stop smoking. If you smoke you are four times more likely to develop a hernia.

Strengthen your abdominal muscles – people with weak abdominal muscles are more likely to get a hernia, so it's important to do some appropriate abdominal exercises. Follow the post-operative 'recovery movements' in this series before progressing to more active abdominal exercise.

Wear a light support garment if it helps you feel more confident to be more active.

Stay active to maintain general physical well-being.

Maintain strong muscles generally (especially your arms) which will help you lift and move more safely, therefore protecting your abdomen.

When you lift or carry anything, do it safely and with good technique.

Adapt gym and fitness exercises and daily activities such as heavy lifting or pulling/pushing movements to make sure they're appropriate.

Speak to your surgeon or ostomy nurse for more advice about reducing your risk of parastomal hernia.



A pal of mine encouraged me to get out walking every day during my chemotherapy treatment. He used to come with me and kept me motivated even on the days when it was hard.

-Billy (Model portrayal for illustrative purposes only)

CANCER

If you have your ostomy due to cancer, you may have additional concerns and activity may not feel like a priority. However, there is growing evidence that being less sedentary, both during cancer treatment and afterwards, is really beneficial and recommended^[10].

Moving more can help you feel better about yourself, improve your diagnosis, help to manage treatment side effects and improve your mental health^[11].

Recommendations published in 2016 by Macmillan^[12] suggest that anyone with a cancer diagnosis should aim to be active if they can.

Previous advice to 'rest up' is now considered outdated, and people with cancer are being encouraged to move more and to engage in small amounts of activity if at all possible. In addition, being active can help reduce and manage the side effects and long term consequences of treatment such as fatigue, muscle loss and weight gain^[13].

And of course physical activity is a great way to help improve your quality

of life and mental health, right at the point where you need it most. We know it's not always easy and your treatment and surgery may leave you feeling very fatigued and unwell.

But even small amounts of movement, such as going for a walk, a gentle bike ride or swim, some mobility and light conditioning exercises at home or doing a bit of gardening or active housework can make all the difference.

For your core and abdominal muscles after ostomy surgery you can follow Green Phase 1 and progress when you're ready.

Please speak with your oncologist, nurse or Healthcare professional about what sort of physical activity is most appropriate for you during your treatment and recovery.



ABDOMINAL AND CORE RECOVERY SERIES

PHASES 1-3

Work through it carefully, listen to your body and seek advice from a physical therapist or a highly trained exercise professional who is approved by your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

How should I use this series?

The moves included in this series are designed specifically for anyone who has had major abdominal surgery and an ostomy, although they are suitable for everyone. They are gentle and appropriate for most people and you can do all the moves in the comfort of your own home.

The movements in this series are not 'active abdominal or core' exercises, they are 'gentle recovery movements' to help reconnect with your abdominal muscles after surgery.

You can work through the moves stage by stage, taking into consideration your health and any other medical conditions. Ask your doctor, surgeon or nurse for advice if you're not sure. There are 3 phases to the series.

Before you start any of the exercises in this series, make sure you are in a safe environment and you are comfortable in your clothing. Check that your chair or bed is fixed and cannot move.

If you have concerns or questions about your ostomy appliance speak to your ostomy nurse or surgeon.



Get Phase 2 and 3 of the series, and view 'how to' videos for all of the recovery phases at meplusrecovery.com



1

Green **PHASE ONE**

Start in the hospital and then continue at home. This phase is also the starting point if you've never done any abdominal movements before, even if your surgery was years ago.

If possible, you can also follow this program BEFORE your ostomy surgery to pre-habilitate and strengthen your muscles prior to your operation.

2

Blue **PHASE TWO**

These are a progression of the green moves, and while slightly more challenging are still gentle. You should be comfortable with the green moves before progressing to this phase.

If you find it hard to get down onto the floor (if you've had a knee replacement for example) choose the 'sitting or standing' movements from this phase or do the moves on your bed.

*For information on Phase 2,
please enroll in me+™ or visit
meplusrecovery.com to learn more.*

3

Purple **PHASE THREE**

These moves are a further progression and should only be done once you're confident with Phase 2. You may get to this stage 8-12 weeks after your surgery.

*For information on Phase 3,
please enroll in me+™ or visit
meplusrecovery.com to learn more.*



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ABDOMINAL & CORE RECOVERY SERIES

Green Phase One

FOUNDATION

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Phase 1 Recovery Series: What are the goals?^[2,14,15]

1. To enhance your recovery and get you back to your daily activities as soon as possible
2. To rebuild your confidence and improve your general well-being after ostomy surgery
3. To help restore your mobility, coordination and balance
4. To engage and strengthen your abdominal muscles after abdominal surgery
5. To reduce your risk of developing a parastomal hernia by strengthening your abdominal muscles

With the approval of your surgeon, you should be able to start these recovery movements 3-7 days after your operation, or as soon as you feel ready.

Then continue when you are discharged and back home.

These moves are also ideal if you had surgery some time ago, but have never done any abdominal recovery exercises. Think of this phase as the foundation series.



It is imperative that you check with your ostomy nurse, physical therapist or surgeon before beginning this series. Show them this booklet and ask them to support you through it.

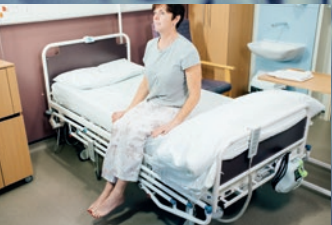


Just take it step by step and don't expect too much of yourself too soon. If you want to try an activity, go along and watch from the sidelines first so you know what to expect. It helps build up the confidence to give it a go next time. -Julie

SAFE MOVING^[2]



Watch our video at meplusrecovery.com 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.

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 surgical sites have not healed properly or you have an infection, then please do not begin this series and speak to your surgeon or ostomy nurse about when you should start.

There are a number of movements in this series; 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^[2]. 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 meplusrecovery.com

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 built-in support.

During surgery to form an ostomy, your abdominal muscles become weak and damaged, so it's very important to begin to gently strengthen them using the 'recovery movements' in this series as soon as you can after surgery. This will help your recovery, posture and confidence as well as reducing your risk of developing a parastomal hernia. It's important to avoid 'active abdominal' exercises for the first few weeks after your surgery^[3].

PLEASE NOTE: *This series has been developed in conjunction with nurses, physical therapists, surgeons and ostomy 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, primary care doctor or physical therapist. 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.*



1 | CORE CONNECT



HOW DOES THIS HELP ME?^[2,14,15]

This is the very first and most important movement in the whole series. It is the foundation for your entire recovery, helping you to reconnect and strengthen your core and abdominal muscles. This can be done in bed or on the floor.

- **Lie on your back** with your knees bent and feet flat.
- **Gently place your hands** on your lower abdomen.
- **Take a breath in** then as you slowly breathe out, try to tighten up your deep abdominal muscles.
- **Imagine drawing your abdomen** away from your hands and down towards your spine. You may feel the muscle under your hands tighten up.
- **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 while continuing to breathe normally.

- **Then relax** and breathe away.

- **REPEAT 5 TIMES**

- **DO THIS 2-3 TIMES PER DAY**

When you can successfully engage your abdominal muscles, you can try the same technique in other positions – such as when you're sitting or standing. Just get the feeling of gently tightening and pulling your abdominal muscles toward your spine. Then you can repeat the movement many times during the day.

It's normal to find this hard just after surgery. But it's important to keep trying, you'll get there eventually. As you get stronger and more controlled, you'll be able to increase the intensity of the contraction and tighten with more strength.



**POST OP
TIP**

Just hold a very soft contraction for a second or two. Put a pillow under your head for comfort and just try to get a feeling of 'engagement' in your deep abdominal muscles.

2 | PELVIC TILT



HOW DOES THIS HELP ME?^[2,14,15]

This move helps you engage and strengthen your abdominal muscles and can help with mobility of your lower back. This can be done in bed or on the floor.

- **Lie on your back** with your knees bent.
 - **Relax** with a slight curve in your lower back – this is the neutral position.
 - **Gently flatten** your lower back into the bed/ floor, rocking your pelvis towards your chest.
 - **At the same time** gently tighten your deep abdominal muscles.
 - **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 5 TIMES**
 - **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.



**POST OP
TIP**

Just tilt a very small amount. Put a pillow under your head for comfort and try to get a feeling of engagement in your deep abdominal muscles and a very gentle tilt of your pelvis.

3 | KNEE ROLLS



HOW DOES THIS HELP ME?^[2,14,15]

This helps you to connect with your abdomen muscles during a simple movement and it begins to strengthen them. It also helps with mobility of your lower back and hips. You can do this in bed or on the floor.

- **Lie on your back** with your knees bent and feet together.
 - **Relax** and breathe normally.
 - **Then gently** tighten your deep abdomen muscles as previously.
 - **Allow your knees** to gently roll over to one side but keep your shoulders flat on the floor. Keep your ankles together and allow your foot to lift.
 - **Only go over as far as is comfortable**, then come back to center 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 abdominal muscles working gently as you roll your knees back up.
 - **Keep your ankles and knees together** as you roll to each side.

- **REPEAT 10 TIMES**
- **DO THIS 2-3 TIMES PER DAY**



POST OP TIP

You can do this on your bed. Put a pillow under your head for comfort and make sure you do it very gently. You may not be able to roll over very far to begin with, but that's fine. As you recover you'll be able to roll over a little further.

4 | SEATED ARM RAISES



HOW DOES THIS HELP ME?^[2,14,15]

This move improves general mobility and requires you to use your core/abdominal muscles as you raise your arms. It also helps to build your confidence in your ability to move around and lift your arms. This can be done sitting on the side of your bed or in a chair.

- **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 place both hands on your knees.
- **Then gently tighten** your deep abdominal muscles as previously.
- **Sit nice and tall** with good posture and imagine a balloon on the top of your head.
- **Slowly raise** one arm out in front of you – only go as high as you feel able. Keep your shoulder down and relaxed.

- **Replace your hand** on your knee and repeat with the opposite arm.
- **Continue to breathe** throughout and keep your abdominal muscles engaged.
- **REPEAT 10 TIMES**
- **DO THIS 2-3 TIMES PER DAY**

TO PROGRESS THIS MOVE

You can lift your arm a little higher, aiming to get your arm straight up above your head. To progress it further you can lift both arms together. Only progress the move when you feel comfortable.



**POST OP
TIP**

You can do this sitting on the side of your bed or on your chair. Initially just try out a small movement as you may feel it pull on your abdomen. As you begin to recover, you should be able to lift your arms higher.

5 | SEATED KNEE LIFTS



HOW DOES THIS HELP ME?^[2,14,15]

This move improves general core control and helps to build your confidence in your ability to move and lift your legs. It is a little more challenging than the other moves, so start very gently. You can do this sitting on the side of your bed or in a chair.

- **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.
 - **Then gently tighten** your deep abdominal muscles as previously.
- **Slowly lift one foot off the floor.**
Only lift a small amount – only a few centimeters to begin with. Keep your abdominal muscles engaged throughout.
 - **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 10 TIMES**
 - **DO THIS 2-3 TIMES PER DAY**
- TO PROGRESS THIS MOVE**
Lift your foot a little higher and hold for a slow count of 3. Do this movement slowly with control.



POST OP TIP

Initially just lift your foot a tiny amount from the floor. You may feel it pull on your abdomen, so start gently and see how it feels.

6 | **STANDING** ROCKING



HOW DOES THIS HELP ME?

This move improves general core control, balance and mobility. This is a really important rehabilitation movement which helps to restore good core function.

- **Stand with your feet together**, as tall as you can and tighten your deep abdominal muscles as previously.
 - **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.
 - **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**

TO PROGRESS THIS MOVE

Try doing this movement without using a support and try closing your eyes.



**POST OP
TIP**

Hold onto a chair, window ledge, kitchen counter or similar support when you first start this movement and make sure you're safe and supported.

7 | **SUPPORTED** SIT TO STAND



HOW DOES THIS HELP ME?[16,17]

This is a simple movement which will help to restore strength in your legs. It improves balance and coordination and will help to rebuild your confidence, especially if you've been in bed a long time. Make sure you're safe and not at risk of falling. Have a support close to you which you can use to assist your balance during this movement.

- **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 – this support is there to assist you, try not to 'pull' or 'push' yourself up. The support is only there for balance.
 - **Try to use your legs** as much as you can in this movement.
 - **First, gently tighten** your deep abdominal muscles as previously.
 - **Then slowly push** yourself up to standing, using your legs as much as possible, but with your support as needed. Use the arms of the chair for a little support, but try to avoid pushing down hard.
 - **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 and avoid pushing down on your support too much.
 - **Take a breath**, and repeat.
- **REPEAT 5-10 TIMES**
 - **DO THIS 2-3 TIMES PER DAY**

COMPLETE 4-6 WEEKS OF GREEN PHASE 1.

Practice the movements every day.
When you feel ready move
onto Blue Phase 2.

For information on Phase 2,
please enroll in me+™ or visit
meplusrecovery.com to learn more.

BECOMING MORE ACTIVE

The good work doesn't stop now. To maintain good core control and strong abdominal muscles it's important to keep moving and doing the movements in the series.

There are some important general benefits to being physically active¹⁸, especially after illness and ostomy surgery:

- Improves mental well-being and reduces stress, anxiety and depression
- Reduces your risk of other conditions such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke
- Appropriate muscle strengthening for your abdominal wall can help reduce the risk of developing a hernia

Hydration

If you have an ileostomy, you may need to consider your fluid intake more carefully especially as you become more active. Having an ileostomy means you'll lose more fluid through your ostomy and it's easy to become dehydrated. You may need to increase your intake of fluid and electrolytes appropriately¹⁹.

Sports and Exercise

There are many people with ostomies who successfully take part in triathlons, contact sports, body building and extreme sports. Nothing is off limits if done safely, with good technique and with appropriate precautions.

It is generally advised to use caution with certain movements and activities, especially if you are higher risk for development of a hernia. In particular try to avoid anything that might cause excessive intra-abdominal pressure.

Intra-abdominal pressure increases when you strain, lift heavy weights, cough, laugh, brace, hold your breath or do certain movements/exercises, especially heavy lifting or bracing positions and certain abdominal exercises. Of course it's impossible to avoid laughing, sneezing and coughing, and many daily activities involve lifting and carrying.

There are two main goals to avoid excessive intra-abdominal pressure:

1. Aim to strengthen your abdominal wall so you can withstand intra-abdominal pressures (from laughing, coughing, sneezing and general lifestyle activities). Think of this as creating your own 'built-in support'.
2. Avoid 'excessive' intra-abdominal pressures caused by inappropriate movements such as certain abdominal exercises, heavy/awkward lifting and by being overweight.

When you do an activity, try to perform it with good technique and in a way which protects your abdomen. The stronger your abdominal muscles get the more you'll be able to withstand intra-abdominal pressures.





MEET OUR MODELS

The models used in the me+™ recovery series are part of our me+ community and they both have an ostomy.

Maria is a runner and also enjoys cycling and triathlon.

Derek is a classical singer and enjoys walking and being active.



There are lots more resources online at convatec.com/meplus

Popular fitness exercises which may not be suitable for people with ostomies include^[2]

- **Plank exercise** – this is a popular ‘core exercise’ but may not be appropriate for anyone with an ostomy as it increases intra-abdominal pressure.
- **Full push ups** – these can cause high intra-abdominal pressure. Adapt them by doing them on your knees or do a bench press (lying on your back) instead.
- **Traditional ‘sit ups’ or crunches**, especially if both feet are lifted off the floor can place strain on the abdominal wall and may need to be adapted or avoided.
- **Any double leg lift exercise** where your feet are off the floor. Even some pilates movements such as the ‘hundred’ and the ‘table top’ exercise may need to be adapted so your feet (or one foot) are on the floor.
- **Full pull/chin ups** place a lot of pressure on the abdomen and increase intra-abdominal pressure and may not be appropriate.
- **Fit ball roll outs**, pikes and roll downs in pilates. Be cautious with any sort of movement which creates an abdominal bulge or a feeling of pressure.

If you’re not sure what these exercises are, ask a physical therapist or exercise specialist for advice.

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