

GENTLY DOES IT

Movement after a
Caesarean Section birth.

By Sally Parkes

Most women I have met through many years of teaching pregnancy yoga want to have a natural birth. And I would agree that as long as there are no existing medical conditions to prevent this, then natural is best for the mother and baby. However, birth can often present us with surprises and challenges that we, the birthing mother, never anticipated, and so we are often led down the route of a medicalised birth and in some cases this will mean birthing your baby via Caesarean Section.

If you have had a similar experience, or teach yoga to mothers who have been through this kind of birth experience, it is important that you do not under-estimate the impact that a C-section birth, whether elective or emergency, can have on the body. It is major surgery and so for the first 10 weeks new mums need to take as much rest as possible; so it is wise to take any help that is offered to get the various chores done that come with being a new mother. Being mindful of how you move throughout the day will also help. For example, having a changing table as opposed to changing baby

on the floor, rolling to the side and using your arms to move from lying to sitting, and using a feeding pillow can all make a huge difference to the stress placed upon the scar tissue. Ensuring you receive proper nutrition, which includes more calories than you would normally eat and good quality fats will also help cell renewal, all of which will accelerate healing.

From around the 10 weeks stage some gentle movement can be undertaken (although you should always check with a doctor or midwife before doing this, especially if the procedure was an emergency as this can cause more trauma). Once you have the all clear to exercise, a great place to start is by balancing your posture. Any abdominal surgery will encourage the spine to round more than normal as the mind and body feels more protective than usual to the vulnerable area of the abdomen. However, after several weeks this will put pressure on the lower back and neck, leading to the shoulders and chest becoming rounded and tight.

So a good place to begin your journey back to health is to stretch out these areas daily. An effective way to do this without

too much strain on the abdomen is to place the hands on the edge of a table or window sill and lower the torso so it is parallel to the floor, and the hips are over the ankles, so the body is at a right angle. Hold for 10 long deep breaths. This will give a wonderful stretch to the backs of the legs too.

Also, throughout the day, try to stand tall and keep rolling the shoulders down away from the ears as you gently pull the tummy in towards the spine. Remember to do this especially when pushing your buggy, as this is often when our eyes and mental focus are on your baby leading to the head dropping forwards and the neck moving out of a neutral alignment. This is the perfect time, however, to reset your posture and by adopting a more positive movement pattern, you will feel instantly more positive as you walk in the fresh air with your precious baby.

From around 12 weeks post-natal you can generally start to work more directly on the abdominal area. It is possible the abdominal muscles themselves will still be a little separated so this area should be trained as a unit involving all the surrounding muscle groups as opposed to completely isolating the abdomen. Effective movements include:



BASIC ABDOMINAL CONTRACTION FOR STRENGTH: Kneel on the hands and knees so you are in a box position and ensure the spine is in a neutral alignment. Exhale deeply and at the same time draw the navel in towards to spine so the entire abdominal area gently contracts. Relax on the inhale. Repeat this ten times. Now

take stretch back in to Downward Facing Dog for five breaths before returning to a Box Position. Now repeat as above but this time as you exhale and draw the abdominal muscles in towards the spine, also move the spine in to flexion, ie Cat Stretch. Repeat ten times.



SHOULDER BRIDGE ROLL FOR MOBILITY:

Lie face up with the legs bent and knees aligned directly over the ankles. The arms are either side of the head in a right angle position. Drop the lumbar spine towards the ground and lift the pelvis in a scooping action. Now gradually peel the spine away from the floor, as though you are lifting one vertebrae at a time. Breathe deeply. Pause when the spine is in a neutral diagonal position before rolling back down very slowly. Repeat ten times, breathing deeply throughout.



LEG RAISE FOR CORE STABILITY: Again kneel in a box position, draw the navel in towards the spine and on the exhale lift and extend the right left. Stay completely focused on keeping the spine and hips static. Lower the leg back down on an inhale. Repeat on the other side until you reach 12-18 repetitions in total. Rest in Childs Pose.

These movements can be done every day and once you feel considerable healing has taken place, you can introduce stronger movements in to your daily activities. Do be patient though and remember that it is not a race. Having a C-section is a huge event and the energy it takes to care for your baby and recover from surgery can be colossal, so be realistic about what you can manage. Just set yourself aside ten minutes a day initially and see where that takes you. Above all else remember these practices every single day:

- To breathe deeply, often
- Remind yourself that you are doing a great job
- That you birthed your baby in the best way you could in that moment

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Birthlight