



Get Ready

FOR SURGERY • FOR RECOVERY • FOR LIFE

Essential exercises for stoma surgery preparation and recovery



We're here to help you throughout your stoma journey

Get Ready is a set of two simple exercises to do before surgery or immediately afterwards to prepare for the next phase of your recovery. You can start as soon as you feel able after surgery, or any time afterwards. They are the 'foundation' phase before starting the main me+ recovery programme.⁴ But remember, it's important to listen to your body and be guided by how you feel.

These exercises form a vital part of your recovery process, to help restore function and strength to your abdominal wall, inner core and pelvic floor muscles. The movements are based on physiotherapy and ASCN Clinical Nurse Guidelines and are safe, appropriate, and gentle.¹⁻⁴

The exercises focus on the following areas:



BREATHING



MUSCLE GROUPS



CORE FUNCTION

"When I went through emergency surgery for a stoma 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 Russell, author of Convatec me+ recovery programme



SPOTLIGHT QUESTION

Who are these exercises for?

The Get Ready set of exercises are intended for people who are in their stoma journey:

- Everyone
- Before surgery
- Immediately post-op
- Months or years post-op
- Parastomal hernia risk reduction and management

DISCLAIMER: Speak with your physiotherapist or nurse before doing these exercises and ask them to show you how to do the movements correctly. If you have had very complex surgery, have an unstable hernia or other complication, please check with your doctor or ask for a referral to a specialist physiotherapist, who can help you do the movements and exercises safely.

1. Intentional Diaphragm Rib Breathing

This breathing exercise helps to engage your deep core muscles and diaphragm, and teaches you how to expand your ribs correctly.



01

Lie on your back in bed with your knees bent, or sit upright on a chair or side of your bed.

02

Place your hands around your lower ribs and relax your body.

03

Inhale softly and deeply through your nose for a count of 4. Feel the breath expand into your ribs, like an umbrella opening. Your hands should move apart.

04

Then exhale gently and slowly through your mouth for a count of 4. Feel your ribs 'close' and pull back down like the umbrella is closing. Your hands will move back together.

05

Avoid holding your breath at any point on the inhale or exhale. Your breathing should be a continuous flow. Repeat 5-6 times.



Scan the QR code to watch our video on Intentional Diaphragm Rib Breathing to make sure you've got the techniques right.



PRACTICE THIS AS OFTEN AS YOU WISH THROUGHOUT THE DAY.
TIP

Feel the breath move laterally into your ribs rather than into your belly or up into your shoulders. Keep your shoulders relaxed.

2. Core Connect

This exercise teaches you to 'reconnect' with your deep inner core muscles. Aim to feel a sensation of these muscles tightening and contracting, gently drawing inwards. At the same time, your pelvic floor is gently moving in and upwards. You can do this exercise on your back or on your side, on your bed or on the floor. Choose which suits you best. Follow these steps in order.



01

Lie on your back or side, knees bent. You can put a pillow under your knees for comfort.

02

Rest your hand on your lower abdomen and relax. Soften your shoulders, belly, ribs, and neck. Imagine you have a belt wrapped around your hips.

03

Inhale softly through your nose. Feel your belly soften and move into your hand, but do not push it out.

04

Gently exhale through your mouth. As you get to the end of the exhale, draw your low abdominal muscles inwards and feel them contract. Imagine you're tightening up the belt that's around your lower abdomen by a couple of notches.

05

Hold the contraction for a second, then relax again completely.



TIP

This is not a sucking in feeling, but a feeling of contraction and connection as you exhale. At the same time, try to feel the pelvic floor draw in and upwards.

Repeat this 2 to 3 times initially with a short gentle hold. As you get stronger, repeat 5 to 10 times and hold for longer.

Initially with this exercise (especially if you are immediately post-surgery), just start with a gentle 'contraction', hold for a second, and let it go. As you progress, you can hold the contraction for longer, and then at the same time try to breathe normally for 5 breaths.



Scan the QR code to watch our video on Core Connect to make sure you've got the techniques right.

Making progress with 'Core Connect'

You can also do the 'Core Connect' in a sitting or standing position. When you get used to it, you can do it when watching TV, in the car, on the train, or sitting at your desk at work.

In time, this muscle activation becomes a 'subconscious' process, and the deep inner core will switch on and work for you when you're lifting things, moving around, pushing and pulling, and even when coughing, laughing, or sneezing. To begin with, you need to reconnect and activate it with a conscious re-training exercise.



"These 'Umbrella breathing exercises' are so easy for patients to understand, they can be done sitting, standing, or lying in bed. I find introducing these simple steps at this early stage gives the patients something to focus on in preparation for surgery. I feel that we are laying down the foundations for a healthy core."

Mary W Quigley, CNS, Clinical Nurse Specialist Colorectal/
Stoma Care. University College Hospital Galway, Ireland

How often and when to do these exercises?



Little and often is best with these exercises. Aim to practice them 2 to 3 times per day or more if you feel able.



ASCN Clinical Nurse Guidelines and physiotherapists recommend that you start these exercises as soon as you can after surgery.¹ Use them to prepare for the main me+ recovery programme, which you can start 3 to 4 days after surgery, or any time in the future when you're ready.



Start gently and build up slowly, listening to your body and tuning into how the muscles are working and how you're feeling. Take the time to watch the videos and understand how to do them correctly.



It's normal to feel some slight muscle fatigue or tenderness as you do them for the first time. It will ease as you get used to them. But if you experience major soreness or discomfort afterwards, reduce the number of repetitions and do them more gently, building back up slowly. Check with your doctor or stoma care nurse if you have any unexpected issues.

Once you have mastered these exercises, you'll be ready to move onto the main me+ recovery programme.

There are 3 phases to the me+ recovery programme. They're designed to continue to help restore function and strength to your abdominal wall, inner core and pelvic floor, and reducing the risk of hernia. Doing these will help you to recover faster, build your confidence, and get back to living your life to the fullest.



Scan the QR code to learn about the rest of the me+ recovery programme.

References

1. Association of Stoma Care Nurses UK. ASCN Stoma care: National clinical guidelines. 2016. https://ascnuk.com/_userfiles/pages/files/national_guidelines.pdf
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3. Thompson, Mary-Jo, and Bernie Trainor. "Incidence of parastomal hernia before and after a prevention programme." *Gastrointestinal Nursing*. vol. 2, 2005, pp. 23-27.
4. Hamasaki, Hidetaka. "Effects of Diaphragmatic Breathing on Health: A Narrative Review." *Medicines*. vol. 7, 2020, pp. 1-19.



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