



Core Basics



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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 unexpected pain or discomfort, adjust your approach and contact your health care professional.

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“Small steps lead to big changes.”

Welcome to me+recovery

Life after ostomy surgery brings change—and support can make all the difference. The me+recovery program offers practical guidance and gentle exercises to help you rebuild strength, confidence, and independence.

Think of it as a supportive guide for your recovery, designed to help you get back to doing what you enjoy, at your own pace.

We're with you, every step of the way.

Who is me+recovery for?

- Anyone living with an ostomy (any type)
- Family members or caregivers offering support
- Those wanting to understand ostomy recovery and manage risk of complications



Recovery Through Connection

Healing isn't just physical—it's emotional and relational. That's why me+ recovery is grounded in the principles of **Healthy Bonds**: fostering connection with yourself, your support network, and your healthcare team. Whether you're a patient, caregiver, or loved one, your presence and encouragement matter deeply.



For more information on the me+ program, scan the QR code.

About me+recovery

The me+recovery program has been developed by Sarah Russell MSc, a clinical exercise physiologist and expert in stoma and hernia rehabilitation. Sarah is the founder of The Ostomy Studio and the author of the Bowel Cancer Recovery Toolkit. She has also published numerous papers in scientific journals and worked in a clinical trial to investigate exercises for people with hernias. Sarah has ensured that me+recovery goes beyond physical healing – it's about reconnecting with your body and rebuilding confidence.

me+recovery is part of the me+ personalized support program from Convatec, your ostomy journey companion. me+ empowers people with an ostomy through tailored education, practical and emotional guidance, and meaningful community connection.

What's included?

- Three easy-to-follow booklets guiding your rehabilitation
- Step-by-step videos for each movement

Before you begin

Your safety comes first.

Before starting:

- Consult your healthcare provider
- If you feel unexpected pain or discomfort, adjust your approach or try a different exercise
- Move at your own pace
- Use supports or aids if recommended







“Strong foundations build confident movement.”

Understanding your recovery journey

Let’s talk honestly about what you’re experiencing. An ostomy is more than a medical procedure - it’s a significant life change that can affect everyone differently. You are not alone on this journey; we are here to support you!

Some days will feel easier than others – and that’s completely normal.



TOP TIP

Notice how you feel:



Energy levels



Discomfort



Emotional state



How movement feels in your body

Why movement and exercise matter

Gentle, intentional movement can:

- Support healing^{1,2}
- Rebuild strength and confidence³
- Boost circulation and overall well-being³
- Lower the risk of complications³
- Help you feel more like yourself³



IT'S NOT ABOUT INTENSE WORKOUTS – IT'S ABOUT MOVING WITH CARE AND PURPOSE.



Recovery is not just about regaining strength - it's about reconnecting and rebuilding trust with your body.

When to rest or adjust

- Rest is a crucial part of healing.
- Sensations of light pulling and tightness around your stoma site can be normal as muscles regain function.
- If you have concerns, adjust your approach and consult your healthcare provider.



LISTEN TO YOUR BODY – IT'S THE WISEST GUIDE YOU HAVE.



“Prepare today for strength tomorrow.”

Your recovery, your way: a flexible approach to movement

Let’s talk about making this exercise program work for you. It is not a strict plan – think of it as a menu. Choose what suits you each day.



**RECOVERY IS PERSONAL, YOUR
JOURNEY, YOUR PACE**



TOP TIP



Try different movements



Notice what feels good



Adapt based on how you feel



Combine options as needed

Little and often

Sprinkle movement throughout your day:

- Waiting for the kettle to boil? Try calf raises
- Brushing your teeth? Balance on one leg
- Watching TV? Stretch gently in your chair



TOP TIP

Short, regular bursts of movement are more powerful than long, tiring sessions. Aim for 3-4 times per day for a few minutes each time to gradually reconnect.

Purpose matters more than perfection

Every movement counts – no matter how small. It's not about doing everything perfectly, focus on your intent.

Pro tips for integrating movement

- Start small – even 2-3 minutes helps
- Choose movements that feel good
- Spread them out through your day
- Listen to your body's signals
- Enjoy reconnecting



CELEBRATE EVERY EFFORT YOU MAKE. PROGRESS IS PROGRESS!



Your emotional health is just as important as your physical health. Talk to your loved ones about how you're feeling and don't be afraid to ask for help and support.

Where to start

Every recovery journey is unique.

Where you begin depends on whether you're preparing for surgery, just recovering, or rebuilding strength months later.



Video: What is me+recovery and when to start?

Pre-Surgery: Your Preparation Pathway

Set the foundations for a smoother recovery:

- Read through this booklet
- Watch the videos linked in Core Basics - The First Steps
- Master the gentle breathing and core connection exercises
- Practice the technique for getting in and out of bed
- Mentally prepare for your journey

Small efforts now lay the foundations for your recovery.

Recent surgery: your gentle beginnings

Start within a few days of your surgery.

Think ABC:

A **Acceptance:** Healing takes time, your body is doing amazing work right now. Be patient and kind to yourself.

B **Breathing:** Focus on gentle diaphragmatic breathing (see Section 5: Core Basics - The First Steps). It reconnects deep core muscles and supports healing. Use breathing to manage discomfort.

C **Careful Movement:** Follow the stoma-friendly techniques for safe everyday movements (see Section 5: Core Basics - Moving Safely with an Ostomy).

Important:

- Balance essential rest with movement and rehabilitation.
- Listen to your body's signals
- Follow your medical team's advice.

6 months post-surgery and beyond: retraining and rebuilding

You've come far – now it's about building confidence and strength:

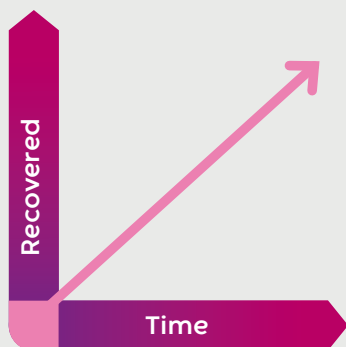
- Quickly review Section 5, Core Basics – The First Steps and Section 6, Moving Safely with an Ostomy
- Retrain muscle pathways gradually
- Build confidence through consistent, gentle practice
- Progress to Core Movement exercises in Booklet 2 when ready

Your journey, your pace – resilience grows with every step.



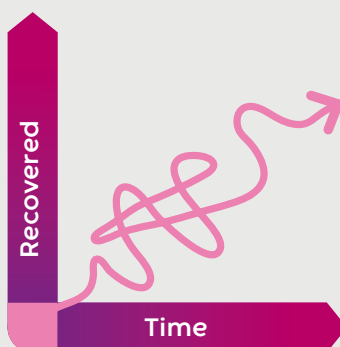
You can invite a friend or family member to join you for a walk or stretch.

What you think it will be like



Surgery

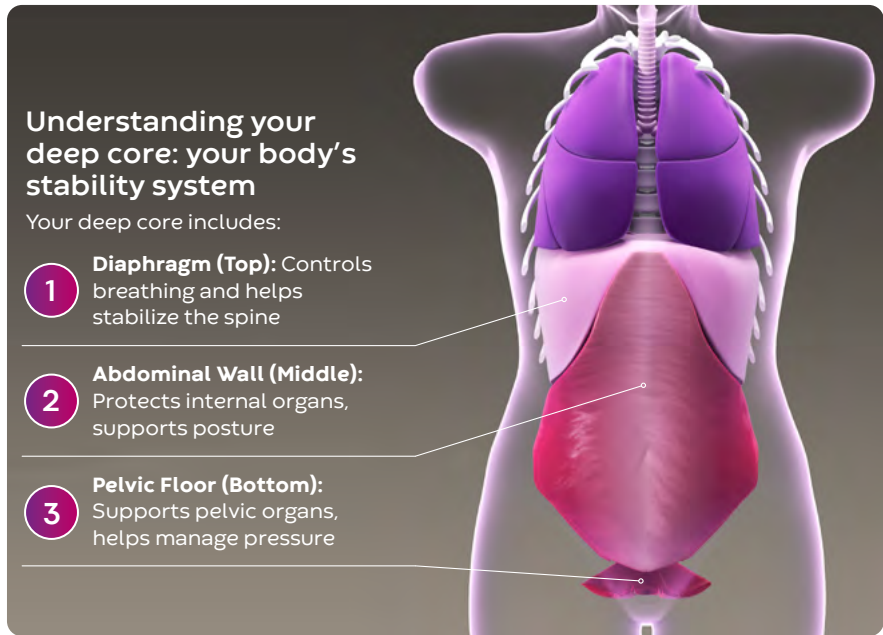
What it will really be like



Surgery

Core Basics - the first steps

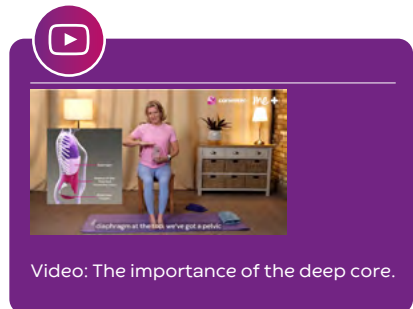
Understanding and reconnecting your deep core system is the foundation for safe recovery.



These structures act as a coordinated unit to:

- Support your spine
- Manage pressure in your abdomen
- Enable stable, comfortable movement
- Help protect your stoma site

After surgery, they may need some help to work together and regain normal function.





Importance of diaphragmatic breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing is a technique that fully activates your primary breathing muscle to improve oxygen flow and help manage pressure within your abdomen.

Why it matters:

- Mobilizes abdominal tissues gently
- Boosts blood flow to healing sites
- Creates a foundation for safe movement



Video: Diaphragm rib breathing technique



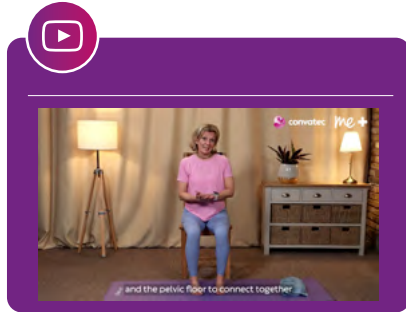
TOP TIP

Practice 3-5 minutes of diaphragmatic breathing, 2-3 times daily.

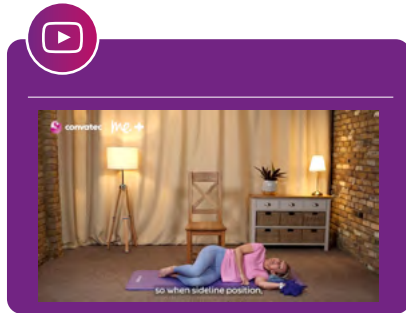


Diaphragmatic breathing and finding your core

Follow along with these videos to learn and practice using diaphragmatic breathing to connect the core abdomen muscles

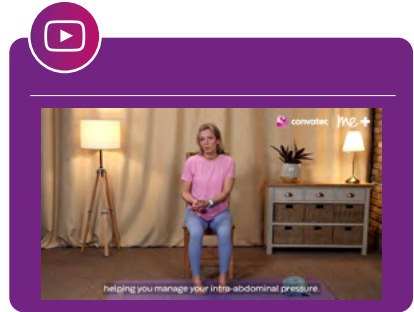


Alternatively, you can try this exercise lying on your side or sitting in a chair

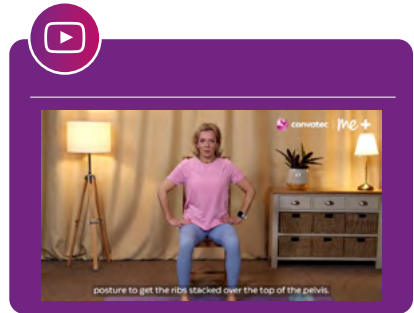


Diaphragmatic breathing and finding your pelvic floor

Continue to use diaphragmatic breathing to engage your pelvic floor muscle, fully reconnecting your deep core system



Alternatively, you can try this exercise sitting in a chair



Integrating diaphragmatic breathing into daily life

Use diaphragmatic breathing to:

- Prepare before an activity (inhale to prepare your core, exhale during the movement to help manage intra-abdominal pressure)
- Relax and regulate your nervous system
- Manage pain and discomfort gently

Diaphragmatic breathing is core training from the inside out!



Breathing is more than a physical act - it's a way to calm your mind, ground your emotions, and rebuild a **healthy bond** with your inner strength. Invite a loved one to practice with you.



**“Protect your core,
protect your strength”**

Managing intra-abdominal pressure

Intra-abdominal pressure (IAP) is the pressure inside your abdomen—essential for breathing, movement, and stability. After ostomy surgery, managing this pressure is important to protect your abdominal wall and stoma site from strain and complications.

Why it matters after surgery

Post-surgery, your abdominal wall has a weaker point—the stoma site—which may strain more easily when pressure increases and lead to complications such as a hernia.

Activities that increase intra-abdominal pressure:

- Lifting heavy items
- Coughing, sneezing
- Straining on the toilet
- Some core exercises

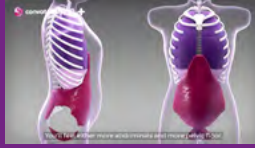
How to manage pressure safely

Being stronger and aware of your core muscles and breathing can help manage pressure.⁸

- Use coordinated breathing during movements
- Engage deep core muscles gently before activity
- Don't hold your breath while lifting
- Avoid straining



Video: Managing intra-abdominal pressure



Video: Managing intra-abdominal pressure

Managing risk of parastomal hernias

Hernias are common:

- 50-80% of ostomy patients develop one within a few years⁴⁻⁶
- Hernias occur when part of the intestine or abdominal tissue protrudes through the abdominal wall at the stoma site
- Risk factors include higher Body Mass Index (BMI), elevated pressure, and weakened abdominal muscles⁷

Prevention through smart movement, appropriate exercises and pressure management is key.

Using diaphragmatic breathing to manage intra-abdominal pressure⁸ and suitable exercises to strengthen abdominal muscles are shown to help reduce hernia risk.⁹

Moving safely with an ostomy

After surgery, it's common to slump forward protectively – but standing tall supports healing.

Benefits of upright posture:

- Reduces back pain
- Improves breathing
- Re-engages abdominal muscles



Early movement is encouraged



Short, frequent walks during hospital stay



Gradually increase distance at home



Take a phone and a companion for safety



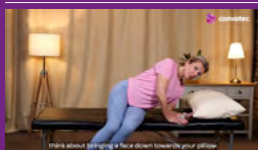
Manage pain to allow easier movement



Rest afterwards – pacing is vital



Video: Stoma friendly lifting



Video: Getting in and out of bed



Video: Stoma friendly lifting



Video: Coughing, sneezing and nose blowing.



“Small steps make a big difference - let's get moving!”

Next steps

Congratulations! You've mastered Core Basics. Continue your journey by moving on to Core Movement.



Scan the QR code to access the Core Movement booklet and demonstration videos.

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Every recovery is different

Go at your own pace and listen to your body

Need support?

Speak to your healthcare team if you have any concerns or contact the Convatec me+ team



me+ recovery

me+recovery is part of the me+ personalized support program from Convatec, your ostomy journey companion. me+ empowers people with an ostomy through tailored education, practical and emotional guidance, and meaningful community connection.