



# Getting fit after stoma surgery

Advice and exercises, before and after your surgery

## INTRODUCTION

### Help yourself back on track

There are many reasons why people may need a stoma for a shorter or longer period of time, but living with a stoma should not prevent you from exercising or from being physically active. Other than extremely rough contact sports or very heavy lifting, you should be able to enjoy the same type of physical activities you enjoyed before your surgery; swimming, skiing, golf, tennis, aerobics, pilates, rowing, whichever is your favourite.

As with any surgery, you will need some recovery time. This can be up to six to eight weeks following your surgery. Whatever exercise you enjoyed before your surgery, once you have passed the convalescence period you should be able to do it again.

The time before surgery is often related to pain as well as insecurity and worries. Pain or any other discomfort you have been experiencing prior to surgery often affects your physical condition. It is important to reflect on how you use your body, both to achieve a better understanding of your body, but most importantly, to gain better well-being. The better your mental and physical state is before your surgery, the easier you will recover and heal.

We hope this booklet can help you get back on track.

Yours sincerely  
The Dansac Team

*We would like to thank Per Herlufsen of Hvidovre Hospital Gastrointestinal unit, Copenhagen for his assistance with this project.*

Pia Espensen, born in 1973, physiotherapist working primarily with training instruction. Pia was operated for Crohn's disease in 1993 and has had an ileostomy since. Her daily exercise programme includes walking for an hour and pilates; she also enjoys aerobics, swimming, dance and yoga.



Lilljan Ø. Kjærra, born in 1951, housewife and creative soul. Lilljan underwent her first surgery for cancer in 1991 and has had a colostomy since 1992. Lilljan trains at a gym two to three times a week and loves walking in the woods and in the mountains of Norway.



Michael Laden, born in 1962, HR Assistant. Michael was operated for Ulcerative Colitis in 2000 and had a temporary ileostomy until he had an ileo-anal pouch made in 2001. He trains three to four times a week, playing football, swimming and cycling. Michael is the author of the book "Get Well in a Morning".



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## WHY EXERCISE?



Exercise and training helps prevent stress and illness. Joints and muscles need their daily dose of 'lubricant' to avoid coming to a standstill and to work at their best. Regular exercise reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke. It also helps you reduce and control other risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, weight gain and diabetes.

But the benefits don't stop there! Exercise makes you look and feel better, you become stronger and more flexible, you will have more energy, and it reduces stress and tension.

After stoma surgery many have discovered that they are keen on achieving goals that they would never have considered before. The change in lifestyle that follows operation can often bring out hidden strengths in people.

## WHY EXERCISE?

### Hints and tips

- Make physical activity a habit by doing it regularly.
- If you stop for any length of time, don't lose hope! Just get started again - slowly - and work up to your old pace.
- Try not to compare yourself with others. Your goal should be your personal well-being, health and fitness.



## THE CORSET

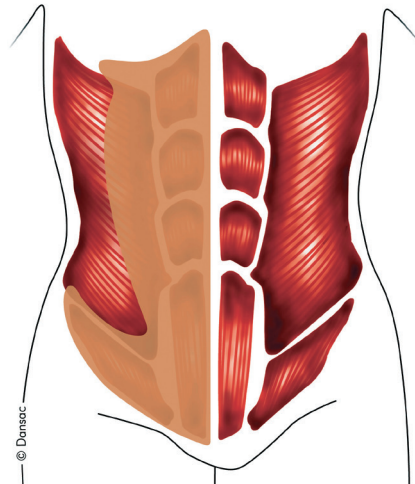
In this booklet we will use the word 'corset' several times. The definition of 'corset' is: 'a tight-fitting bodice to shape and support the body'.

This also describes the relationship of our abdomen to our spine. Thus, throughout this booklet the use of the word 'corset' does not refer to an external garment but to our own natural anatomical corset.

### Abdominal wall:

The abdominal wall extends from the base of the chest to the top of the hip-bone. Under the skin there is fatty tissue, connective tissue, and the superficial abdominal muscles. These muscles form the framework of the abdominal wall.

The umbilicus, surgical scars and where the stoma is formed are all sites of weakness within the abdominal wall.



## THE CORSET

Everyone has their own muscular corset around the spine. It is a functional working unit that shapes and supports the body - a working unit that can and should be exercised! This muscular corset is the centre of the body and is very important for movement, posture and for the shape of our spine and abdomen.

Each movement we make affects the abdominal and back muscles; this means that even the small movement of an arm can be measured in the abdominal and back muscles.

Therefore consider your muscle corset as a real corset consisting of actively working and sensitive muscles. These muscles must be regularly exercised just as any other muscles in the body.

The abdominal area together with the spine is 'the core of the body'. A place related to feelings, strength, power, security and self-confidence. The abdominal muscles, which the stoma penetrates, are a part of this core.

Creating harmony and balance in the body through exercise and training lead to better posture and increased body awareness. This will in turn accelerate the healing process and help you avoid the risk of developing a hernia\* around the stoma.

### Hints & tips

- Think about whether you like to exercise alone or with other people, outside or inside, what time of day is best, and what kind of exercise you most enjoy doing.
- If you feel like quitting, remind yourself of all the reasons you started and all the benefits that are in it for you!
- Don't push yourself too hard. You should be able to talk during exercise.

*\* A hernia is a weakness in the muscle layer where internal organs such as the intestine may protrude. A parastomal hernia appears as a bulge around the stoma.*

This book focuses on exercises and movements that strengthen and support 'the core of the body'. Through movements and breathing you will learn to increase the strength of your abdominal muscles and the muscles supporting the spine and your lower back.

The earlier you start the exercises the better. Make yourself familiar with the exercises prior to surgery. This will help you gain control of your body core post-operatively and thus promote healing and quicker recovery.



*Walking is a good place to start - and remember that even walking to the end of the hall or around the house is enough in the beginning. When returning home after surgery, you will feel exhausted and the thought of just climbing the stairs can feel like conquering Mount Everest.*



## DAY 1 AFTER SURGERY



### Exercises to start with

Remember to do the exercises slowly and in a controlled way. Do not rush the movement. It is important that your breathing is correct and that you are aware of how you feel when doing the exercises. You should feel comfortable at all times.

**If uncomfortable** - stop.

**If tired** - rest or sit down.

Exhale when you need strength, power and steadiness, because it activates the deep abdominal muscles.

## All exercises must be done lying (flat) in bed with your knees bent

### 1. Breathing

Breathe in through your nose (mouth closed); inhale all the way down into your abdomen. Feel your abdomen bulge. Blow out through your mouth (empty your abdomen) so that your abdomen is flat. When doing this breathing exercise, be conscious of pressing your lower back down into the mattress.



### 1.A

Breathe in and lift your arms above your head while breathing out. Breathe in again and lower your arms on your next exhalation. Remember to only move your arms when you breathe out. Keep your lower back pressed down into the mattress.



## DAY 1 AFTER SURGERY

### 2. Pelvic floor lift

This exercise helps to ease the strain in the pelvic floor area. It relieves the increased blood volume pressure in this area (a common problem after abdominal surgery) as well as strengthens the pelvic muscles. It also increases the blood circulation in this area which promotes healing.



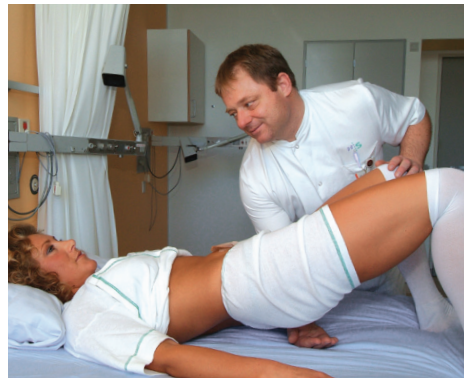
#### 2.A

Lift the pelvic floor, hold and release down.

#### 2.B

Lift the pelvic floor, rock slowly from side to side and release down.

*Repeat 5 times to start with, then regularly increase the repetitions.*







Valves in the vein keep blood moving in the right direction. When these valves become incompetent (disease, surgery, immobilisation), the backflow of venous blood causes venous congestion and the risk of developing a deep venous thrombosis (DVT).

Walking and staying active as soon as possible after surgery is of great importance to reduce the risk of DVT. Other preventive measures include compression stockings and exercising your legs by flexing and stretching (as shown). This helps pump fluid from your legs back to your heart.

## GETTING OUT OF BED

Position yourself on your side, place both arms in front of your chest and push up. Keep your back straight, try to control your abdominal (pull in) and lower back area. Think of holding your corset in place. Use your breathing and get up whilst exhaling.



## POST-OP

Sit on the bed. Lean slightly forward with your back straight. Swing your arms in turn up and down/back and forth. Remember to exhale when your arms are up/forward. Concentrate on pulling your abdomen in towards the spine.



### Hints and tips

- Do the breathing exercise every day. This is important for your body system to function at its best.
- Do the lying down exercises daily the first 3-4 weeks.
- Get up and move around as often as possible.

Do as many repetitions as you can of each exercise. Start with 5 to 7 repetitions of each exercise and gradually increase to 20-25 repetitions as you get stronger and your well-being increases.



## RECOVERY PERIOD

The recovery period will last for about 6-8 weeks after surgery. During this time you must be cautious when lifting - a carton of milk is enough! Concentrate on having your corset and your body centre in balance.

### Exercises to be done lying down

- when you are in control of the pelvic area and can hold the abdomen and lower back steady.  
Lie with your knees bent, press them together and move them from side to side without lifting your back or bottom from the mattress. Remember - exhale when you move your knees from side to side. Inhale between the movements. Be in control of the movement!



### Hints and tips

- Be conscious of your breathing: remember to exhale when you need strength, power and steadiness (exhaling activates the deep abdominal muscles and thus the corset).
- When the recovery period is over increase the length of your walks.
- Exercise at least twice a week.

## Sitting exercises

Sit with your back straight, on a chair or an exercise ball. Use your breathing and lift your arms above your head while exhaling, lower your arms while inhaling.



When using the exercise ball it is important to constantly keep the abdominal and back muscles activated to keep your balance. This is why the exercise ball is a great training aid for YOU.

### Exercises to strengthen the abdominal and back muscles



#### A Sitting exercise

Sit on a chair. Lean slightly forward with your back straight. Swing your arms in turn up and down/back and forth. Remember to exhale when your arms are up/forward.

Concentrate on keeping your abdomen tight (pull in towards the spine) and your back straight.

*Repeat 5 times to start with and steadily increase the number of repetitions.*



#### B Standing exercise

As above, but standing. Stand with your feet a hip width apart. Tighten your pelvic floor. Tighten your abdomen and lower your shoulders. Slightly bend your legs and lean forward with your back straight. Swing your arms in turn back and forth.

Remember to hold your abdominal muscles tight, your back straight and use your breathing.

*Repeat 5 times to start with and steadily increase the number of repetitions.*

You can also do this exercise sitting on an exercise ball. Lean slightly forward with your back straight. Swing your arms in turn up and down/back and forth. Remember to exhale when your arms are up/forward.

## 8 WEEKS AND BEYOND

### Exercises to be done when the recovery period is over

#### Abdominal exercise 1

Lie on your back on a firm surface, your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Place your hands behind your neck, breathe in and pull your abdomen in. Breathe out while lifting your head off the surface. Hold for two seconds before slowly returning to starting position.

*Repeat 5-10 times. Increase the number of repetitions as you gain strength.*

Instead of placing your hands behind your neck you can place them on your thighs or fold them over your chest. Breathe out while lifting and inhale while returning to starting position. Always remember to pull your abdomen in.



#### Abdominal exercise 2

This is when you have gained strength and are in control of the movement in exercise 1. Lie on your back on a firm surface, hands behind your neck.

Lift your head and 'bicycle' your legs, remember to pull your abdomen in and press your back against the floor/mattress.

*Repeat 4-8 times.*

#### Abdominal exercise 3

Lie with your back on the ball. Fold your hands over your chest or place them behind your neck. Pull your abdomen in and lift your upper body as high as possible. Breathe out while lifting and inhale while returning to starting position.

*Lift and lower 8 times, rest and repeat.*



## EXERCISES

### To exercise all abdominal and back muscles

#### A

Kneel on something soft with a chair in front of you and place your hands on the chair. Tighten your pelvis and your abdomen. Hold your back straight and let your neck be a natural extension of your back. Keep the tension, straighten your knees and lift your body, resting on your elbows. Your hips should be stretched. Slowly lower your knees down again.

#### Focus

*Tighten your abdominal muscles and keep your back straight.  
Repeat 5 times and gradually increase the repetitions.*

#### B

If you have an exercise ball, kneel with the ball in front of you and place your hands on the ball. Tighten your pelvis and abdominal muscles. Hold your back straight and let your neck be a natural extension of your back. Keep the tension and push/lean forward so that your elbows are now resting on the ball. Your hips should be stretched. Pull back.

#### Focus

*Tighten your corset and keep your back straight.  
Repeat 5 times and gradually increase the repetitions.*

#### C - The Plank

Do this exercise on the floor. Lie down supported by your elbows, knees and toes on the floor. Tighten your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles and lift yourself up so that you are resting on your toes and elbows, keeping your body straight. Hold the position for a count of 5. Repeat 5 times. Over time you will become stronger and your aim will be to hold the position for longer.





## D

Kneel with your hands on the floor. Lift your right arm and left leg, making sure your body is as long as possible with a long neck and your face pointing downwards. Hold the position, count slowly to 5, lower and lift the other arm and leg. Remember to pull your abdomen towards your spine and hold your back straight. Repeat 5 times in the beginning. Remember to increase the number of repetitions as you gain strength.



*The same exercise can be done on the exercise ball.*



## GENERAL HINTS & TIPS

- Look for ways to add more physical activity to your daily routines.
- Making small changes in your lifestyle can make a big difference in your overall health.
- Take a walk for 10 or 15 minutes during your lunch break.
- Take stairs instead of escalators and lifts.
- Park further away from the shops and walk.
- Choose activities you enjoy. Pick a starting date that fits your schedule and gives you enough time to begin your programme.
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes.
- Start slowly - don't overdo it! If uncomfortable - stop!
- Try to exercise at the same time each day so it becomes a regular part of your lifestyle.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after each exercise session.
- Ask family or friends to join a programme with you.
- If you miss a day, plan a make up day. Don't double your exercise time during your next session.
- Join an exercise group or health club.





## NOTES

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