



*Women's Health*

## **Pelvic floor muscle contractions early after delivery**

...do they cause perineal pain in women who have just given birth?

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Pelvic floor muscle training is effective and necessary in the prevention and treatment of pelvic floor dysfunction during pregnancy and after childbirth. Because of the high prevalence of perineal pain observed in women after childbirth, many women and caregivers fear to start pelvic floor muscle training immediately after childbirth.

However, it is still unknown whether pelvic floor muscle contractions (PFMCs) provoke perineal pain in women shortly after childbirth. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate whether PFMCs performed immediately after childbirth are painful or not.

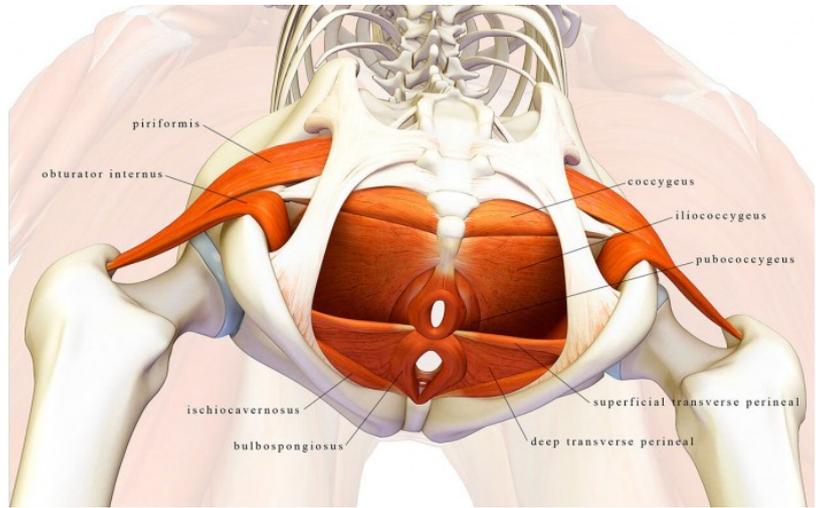
We conducted an observational longitudinal study. Perineal pain during PFMCs, during several activities of daily living (ADL) and during micturition and defecation was assessed using a VAS scale ranging from 1 to 10. Assessment was repeated twice: first early after delivery (first six days postpartum) and second at nine weeks after giving birth.

A total of 233 women participated (148 primiparous and 85 multiparous). Immediately postpartum, the prevalence and intensity of pain during ADL (73 percent; VAS 4.9), micturition (47 percent; VAS 3.4) and defecation (19 percent; VAS 3.6) were significantly higher than during PFMC (8 percent; VAS 2.2).

At nine weeks after delivery, a third of all women experienced perineal pain during sexual intercourse and 18 percent during defecation, but none during PFMCs.

In conclusion, many women suffer from perineal pain immediately after childbirth, especially during ADL, micturition and defecation. But not during pelvic floor muscle exercises!

Although the pain can be intense in some women, the discomfort felt during exercises was always slight. These results show that fear of perineal pain should not discourage women to start pelvic floor muscle training shortly after giving birth.



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