

# Coccyx pain following childbirth (postnatal)

**This leaflet is designed to help you if you are experiencing coccyx (base of spine) pain following the birth of your baby/babies.**

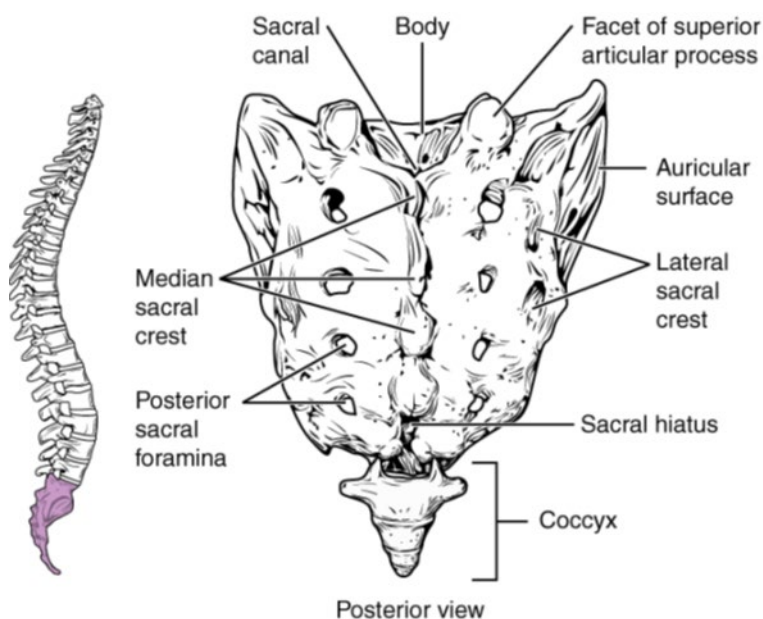
## What is the coccyx and why do I have pain?

The coccyx (tailbone) is a small triangular bone at the base of your spine that consists of 3-5 vertebrae.

The coccyx is attached to the sacrum/base of the spine by various ligaments and the 'levator ani' muscle (part of your pelvic floor muscles).

Coccyx pain or 'coccydynia' is a rare condition that affects women five times more than men.

During childbirth, the ligaments around the coccyx are strained from pushing. This can lead to pain in the coccyx area making it difficult to sit down comfortably. Most women find standing up from sitting uncomfortable and find that moving around helps. It can take 6-12 weeks for the coccyx to heal and the pain to resolve.



## What makes the coccyx pain worse?

- Prolonged sitting, especially on a hard surface
- Bending
- Lifting
- Climbing stairs
- Opening bowels
- Some women can feel increased pain during menstruation and sometimes with intercourse.
- Other causes for coccyx pain include:
  - Trauma/fall onto buttocks and coccyx.
  - Repetitive micro trauma, for example from inadequate sitting posture or sports such as cycling and motor sports.

## How can I manage my pain?

Most cases improve with conservative management, which includes:

- Using non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDS) – visit your GP for advice.

- Using specific coccyx cushions (U shaped) or gel cushions to relieve pressure on the coccyx. Try to use this cushion every time you sit down.
- Avoid sitting for prolonged periods.
- Postural correction – adequate sitting and standing posture can help to alleviate pressure on the coccyx. Ensure you sit on an appropriate cushion with your back supported. Your weight should be on your sitting bones underneath your buttocks. Do not sit slumped. When standing, try to tilt your pelvis into neutral alignment (tuck your coccyx/bottom in). Do not let your bottom/back arch backwards.
- Try to sleep on your side with pillows for support if needed.
- Adjust how you get in and out of bed – try to roll onto your side and push yourself up, rather than sitting up directly onto the coccyx.
- Using ice – wrap ice pack/frozen peas in a tea towel and place on the painful area for 10-20 minutes. Can be used up to three times a day if required.
- Stool softening medication if pain is aggravated by bowel movements – visit your GP for advice.
- Physiotherapy and exercises.

## Physiotherapy for coccyx pain

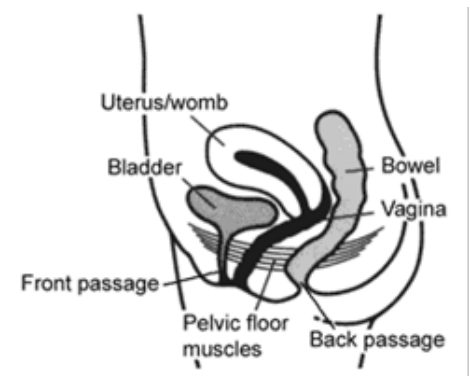
A physiotherapy assessment can help to determine the triggers of coccydynia. The physiotherapist can then advise on postural correction and teach you exercises to help strengthen the muscles supporting your coccyx and lower back/pelvis.

## Exercises

### Pelvic floor exercises:

Due to the attachments of your pelvic floor to the coccyx, pelvic floor exercises can help to relieve coccyx pain.

Try to find a position that does not aggravate your pain – for example, lying on your tummy, side lying or sitting on an adequate cushion. You can do your pelvic floor exercises lying on your back with your knees bent, as long as there is no discomfort.



### Exercise 1 'Slow ones' (these also help with urge incontinence and urgency)

- You should begin exercising your pelvic floor lying on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the bed.
- Tighten the back passage as if trying to hold in wind and then bring this contraction forward as if trying to hold in a tampon or stop urine.
- Do not use your tummy or buttock muscles when doing this exercise. You should not see any external movement.
- Aim to hold this contraction for 3-5 seconds. Build up strength within your pelvic floor until you can hold for 10 seconds.
- Keep breathing throughout and then relax your pelvic floor for at least 6 seconds in between each contraction.

Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent

## **Exercise 2 'Quick ones'** (these can also help with stress incontinence)

- You should begin exercising your pelvic floor lying on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the bed.
- Tighten the muscles as above.
- Hold for 1 second and relax for 1 second. Repeat 10 times.

**Repeat each exercise (slow and fast) 10 times, 3-4 times a day.**

## **Other exercises that may help**

### **Pelvic floor relaxation**

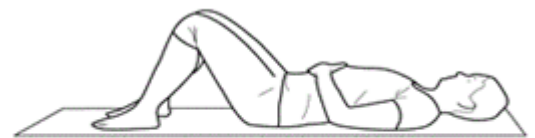
It is just as important to learn to relax your pelvic floor as it is to strengthen it. If your pelvic floor muscles are tense, they may pull on your coccyx and this can lead to pain.

Lie down with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed (crook lying).

Listen to your breathing. You may notice your stomach rising as you breathe in. This is called diaphragmatic breathing.

Then follow these three steps:

- a) Breathe into your stomach so that it rises up. You can place your hands on your stomach to feel the stomach rising. Hold your breath for 4-5 seconds, making sure to keep your shoulders relaxed and your ribcage soft.
- b) While you are holding your breath, imagine your pelvis getting wider, consciously relax your tummy downwards and relax your pelvic floor muscles from front to back opening (e.g. as if you are passing urine, opening your vaginal muscles as if using a dilator and as if opening your bowels. You could also use the image of a rosebud opening, until you feel them soften. Remember that this is NOT an active push; you are trying to "let go" of all the muscles instead.
- c) Then 'sigh' the breath out, with an open mouth as if steaming up a window. This should be completely passive in nature.



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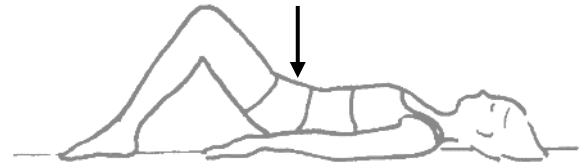
The above technique does require lots of practice and concentration to begin with. Once you are able to do this consistently, incorporate it into your pelvic floor muscle training by **relaxing your pelvic floor muscles on the in-breath, and contracting them on the out-breath**. If you are doing slow contractions, remember to take normal breaths in between each contraction. Alternatively, you can complete this exercise sitting in a comfortable and supported position.

### **Buttocks squeezes:**

- Lying or sitting, squeeze your buttocks together, hold for 10 seconds and relax. Repeat 10 times.

### Transversus abdominis:

- Start lying down with knees bent and feet resting on the bed.
- Take a breath in, and then as you breathe out gently draw your lower abdomen in towards your spine.
- Try to hold this, while continuing to breathe, and then relax.
- Try to increase the hold until you can hold for the count of 10 and repeat 10 times;
- Always draw these muscles in to support you when you are doing any abdominal exercises and in any activity involving your back e.g. lifting anything, including your baby; rising from sitting; getting out of bed; and bending over. This is another good habit for life.

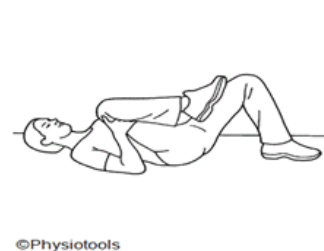


### Pelvic tilting:

- Start lying down with knees bent and feet resting on the bed, draw in your lower abdomen, as in the transversus abdominis exercise above.
- At the same time tuck your tailbone under, flattening the curve of your lower back.
- Keep breathing while holding this position for a few moments and then relax.
- This exercise can be done at any time and is also very good for easing an aching back.

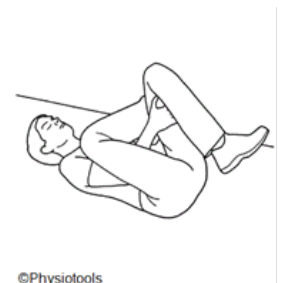
### Single leg back stretch

- Start lying down.
- Hug one knee to your chest.
- Hold the stretch for 30 seconds.
- Repeat with other leg.



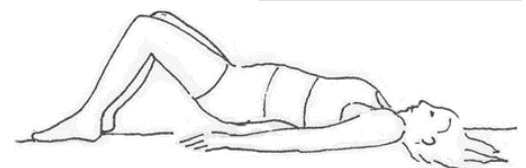
### Piriformis stretch

- Lie down, and place one ankle just above and on top of the opposite knee.
- Pull the bottom leg towards your chest and hold for 30 seconds.
- Repeat on the other side.



### Bridging:

- Start lying down with knees bent and feet resting on the bed, draw in your lower abdomen and tilt pelvis, as in exercise 1+2.
- Lift your bottom into the air and hold.
- Hold for 3-5 seconds and increase this to 10 seconds as able.



### The clam:

- Lying on your side with knees and heels together.
- Lift the top leg off the other without rocking backwards and keeping heels together.
- Repeat 10 times each.



### Hamstring stretch:

- Sit/stand with your leg stretched and point your toes up towards the ceiling.
- Lean forwards over your straight leg. You should feel a stretch down the back of your leg.
- Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat each side 3 times.



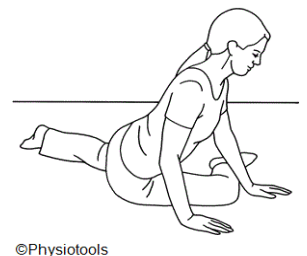
### Kneeling hip stretch:

- Start by kneeling on one knee with the opposite foot on the floor.
- Place your hands on your front knee and lean forward until you feel a stretch in the front of your back leg.
- Hold for 30 seconds.
- Repeat on the opposite side.



### Pigeon pose:

- Sitting on the floor, place one leg behind you and fold your front leg in front with the knee bent.
- Lean forward.
- Hold for 30 seconds.
- Repeat on opposite side.



### Where to find more information

[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/coccydinia/Pages/Causes.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/coccydinia/Pages/Causes.aspx)

[www.coccyx.org/](http://www.coccyx.org/)

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To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Women's Health Physiotherapy, June 2016

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