



Pelvic Floor Exercises

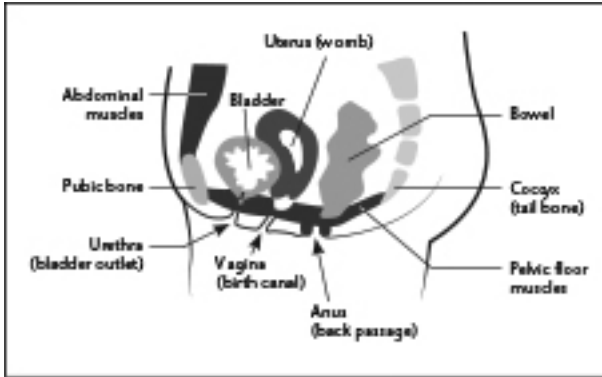
Information for women
from physiotherapy services



YOUR PELVIC FLOOR

This leaflet helps explain how to exercise and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. These muscles form a broad sling running from front to back and as their name suggests, they form the floor of your pelvis.

Left-side view of a woman's bladder and related structures



Your pelvic floor muscles need to be strong and firm. A good pelvic floor will help relieve the symptoms of:

Stress incontinence: leakage from your bladder or bowel when you cough, sneeze, laugh, exercise, lift or bend.

Urge incontinence: Failure to reach the toilet in time.

Urgency: A desperate need to empty your bladder or bowel.

Frequency: Emptying your bladder more than eight times each day.

If you have a weak pelvic floor you may also experience a sensation of something coming down the birth canal or back passage (**prolapse**).

Some women can also have loss of sexual sensation during intercourse.

Causes

The pelvic floor muscles can become weak or damaged as a result of:

- ❖ Pregnancy and childbirth
- ❖ Continual straining to empty the bowels
- ❖ Being overweight
- ❖ Frequent heavy lifting
- ❖ Menopausal changes
- ❖ Pelvic surgery
- ❖ Long periods of inactivity following injury or illness
- ❖ Lack of general fitness

The basic exercise

- ❖ Lie, sit or stand with your knees slightly apart.
- ❖ Tighten up your back passage as though you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind.
- ❖ At the same time tighten your muscles that you would use to stop yourself from passing urine.

The feeling is one of **'squeeze and lift'** closing and drawing up the front and back passages.

This is called ‘**a pelvic floor contraction**’

It is easy to use the wrong muscles instead of the pelvic floor muscles.

- ❖ Don't clench your buttocks
- ❖ Don't squeeze your legs together
- ❖ Don't hold your breath

You may feel some tightening around your lower stomach (**bikini line**) - this is normal.

There are a few ways you can check you are doing the exercises properly.

While sitting or lying you can gently insert your thumb or index finger into your vagina. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the muscles move/tighten around your thumb/finger.

If you are having sex, try to exercise your pelvic floor; your partner should be able to feel the muscles tightening.

Do NOT do these exercises whilst passing urine.

It is very important to make sure you are using the right muscles, otherwise there may not be any improvement. You could even cause more damage. Ask for help if you are not sure that you are using the right muscles. Your physiotherapist can help you.

YOUR EXERCISE PROGRAMME

Endurance

- ❖ Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold them for up to a maximum of 10 seconds
- ❖ Relax fully for 4 seconds
- ❖ Now tighten again for 10 seconds
- ❖ Relax fully for 4 seconds
- ❖ Repeat this until the muscle gets tired

How many seconds can you hold it for? Seconds

How many times can you repeat it? Times

Eventually aim for a 10 second hold repeated 10 times.

Co-ordination

- ❖ Quickly tighten up your pelvic floor muscles
- ❖ Hold for 1 second and then relax fully
- ❖ Repeat this until the muscles get tired

Eventually aim for 10 times.

To strengthen the muscles it is necessary to repeat the slow and fast exercises 4 to 6 times each day. As you get stronger, build up to doing 10 slow exercises and 10 fast exercises 4 to 6 times each day.

You could do your exercises:

- ❖ After going to the toilet.
- ❖ While watching T V.
- ❖ Whilst sitting feeding your baby (if you are a new mum)
- ❖ At meal times.

To help prevent leakage of urine you should tighten your pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing, lifting or with any other activity which causes leakage.

This is also very important if you have symptoms of prolapse. Once your pelvic floor muscles are strong it is important to maintain them. Continue your exercises for the rest of your life. If you do not, then your muscles could become weak again.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Some questions answered which will help you to achieve your goal.

Does my weight have anything to do with my problem?

Getting down to your ideal weight will reduce the amount of strain placed on your pelvic floor muscles and can lead to a considerable improvement in your symptoms.

Does drinking a lot of caffeine affect my symptoms?

Caffeine can act as a stimulant to your bladder and is therefore best avoided or reduced. Caffeine is present in coffee, tea, cola, Irn bru, chocolate and some medication (**your physiotherapist will discuss this with you**).

I tend to be constipated on occasions and then my symptoms seem to be worse. Why?

Straining to open the bowels stretches the pelvic floor muscles, which can weaken them. Check your diet to avoid this problem, or see your GP for advice. Ensuring an adequate fluid intake can help.

Are there any exercises I should avoid?

Straight leg sit ups and double leg lifts put severe pressure on the pelvic floor (**and the back**) and should be avoided. Also avoid high impact activity, for example, any activity involving both feet off the ground at the same time - running, jumping and so on. More suitable exercise would be pilates, tai chi or yoga.

Remember:

Liquid intake: You should drink roughly 3 to 4 pints (**1.5 to 2 litres**) of liquid per day. Drinking less than this will not reduce your symptoms.

Frequency of bladder emptying: Try to avoid emptying your bladder too frequently as this can reduce its ability to hold urine. If you feel that you need to go more often than every 2 hours (**frequency**) then try to train your bladder to wait longer. When you feel the urge to empty your bladder soon after having done so try these delaying techniques:

- ❖ Keep calm
- ❖ Tighten your pelvic floor muscles
- ❖ Sit on something hard, for example, the arm of a chair
- ❖ Distract your mind (**for example, keep busy, make a phone call**)
- ❖ Walk on your tiptoes

However, it is important to empty your bladder regularly throughout the day (**3 to 4 hourly**) to avoid overstretching the bladder.

Bladder emptying: Do not crouch or hover over the toilet seat. It is important to sit down and completely empty your bladder, without straining, each time you go to the toilet. Urine left inside the bladder can irritate the bladder lining causing inflammation (**which might aggravate symptoms**).

It can help to:

- ❖ Lean forward as you pass urine
- ❖ Or stand up, walk about for a few moments, then sit and try again.

YOUR EXERCISE DIARY

You might like to use the table below (**for the first 2 weeks**) to remind you to do your exercises at leasttimes a day.

Week one

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							

Week two

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							

Slow contractions	Fast contractions
Hold for: _____ seconds	Repeat: _____ times
Rest for: _____ seconds	
Repeat: _____ times	

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Pub. date:	April 2022
Review date:	April 2024
Issue No:	06
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PIL.PELVIC.1162.L
22_07471