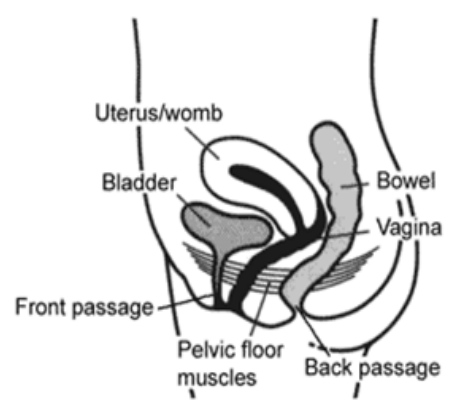


Pelvic floor muscle exercises

This leaflet outlines exercises you can do to help your symptoms of urinary urgency, urge incontinence, frequency, or symptoms of prolapse.

Pelvic floor muscles

These are the sling of muscles that fill the bottom of pelvis and form squeezing muscles surrounding the back, vaginal and urethral passages. These are the same muscles you use when you want to stop yourself passing urine or wind.



Why is it important to do pelvic floor exercises?

These muscles support the pelvic organs, control the bladder and bowels and are used during normal sexual function.

Therefore, it is important to strengthen the pelvic floor to have better control of the bladder and bowels, to improve support of pelvic organs and to improve sexual function.

Weakness of these muscles can follow childbirth, constipation, persistent cough or occur around the menopause. Some people experience leaking of urine during activities such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, exercising, lifting and playing sport. This is described as stress urinary incontinence. The pelvic floor muscles may be unable to cope with the increased intra-abdominal pressure during the above. Some experience sudden urges to pass urine and may leak urine before they arrive at the toilet. This is described as urge incontinence. Some people experience a dragging sensation, pressure, or a bulge around the vagina. This is described as pelvic organ prolapse. Exercising pelvic floor muscles are helpful in all the above conditions.

How do I know which muscle to exercise?

If you don't know where your pelvic floor is, you can find it by imagining you are going to the toilet and are trying to stop yourself, or you can put two fingers into your vagina and try to squeeze around them. You could also imagine trying to suck something up into your vagina. The muscles you use to do this are your pelvic floor muscles, and you should feel your vaginal and back passage muscles tighten and lift a little.

How do I exercise the muscles?

You must do both fast and slow exercises to make your pelvic floor muscles stronger. It is important to learn to do the exercises in the right way and to check from time to time that you are still doing them properly.

Slow exercises

- You should sit comfortably with your knees slightly apart (or lie down with your knees bent).
- Try to squeeze as if you are trying to hold in a tampon, and stop wind and urine from coming out. Do not use your tummy muscles or your buttocks when you are doing this exercise. Your buttocks and legs should not move at all.

- When you can do this, squeeze the muscles as tight as you can, and hold for as long as you can, up to 10 seconds. You may not be able to hold it for more than two or three seconds at first.
- You should be aware of the skin around the back passage tightening and being pulled up and away from the chair. Repeat this as often as you can, up to ten times, but have a rest in between each one for 4-5 seconds.

Fast exercises

- It is also important to work the pelvic floor muscles to react quickly to stop you leaking when you cough or sneeze. Therefore, practice tightening your pelvic floor quickly and then relax.
- Fast exercises are done in the same way as slow exercises but when you squeeze the muscles, let go immediately so that you only feel a very quick lift in your pelvic floor. You should repeat these exercises as many times as possible, up to 10 times.
- The fast and slow exercises together make up one exercise session. You should do 3-5 sessions per day. If you do less than 3 sessions, you risk not building enough strength to help your symptoms. Do not do so many exercises that the muscles ache! Your muscles will improve and strengthen with time and exercise.
- Both pelvic floor exercises can be done in any position and at any time. It helps to associate these exercises with activities you do regularly every day, e.g. boiling the kettle, watching TV, brushing your teeth, waiting at traffic lights, waiting for the bus or in a supermarket queue.

Helpful tips

- Avoid constipation. Straining to empty bowels may make urinary, bowel and prolapse problems worse. It is important to sit relaxed on the toilet seat with feet supported and knees higher than your hips.
- Try to cut down caffeine (and alcohol) intake and replace with decaffeinated tea, coffee, and water. Diluted fruit juice, squash and herbal/fruit teas can also help keep fluid intake up.
- Tighten pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing, shouting, lifting or any time where there is an increase in the pressure on the muscles. This is called “the knack”.
- If you are overweight, losing weight helps in reducing extra strain on the pelvic floor muscles.
- Avoid lifting heavy weights if able.
- It can take three months or longer to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. Therefore, it is important to be persistent and to stick with the exercises which help in the success of treatment – completing both fast and slow exercises 3-5 times a day.

Where to find more information

- www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Incontinence-urinary/Pages/Introduction.aspx
- www.continence-foundation.org.uk/

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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

J Churches, W&C Physiotherapist, April 2020. Reviewed: May 2022. Next review due: May 2024

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