

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy

Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women

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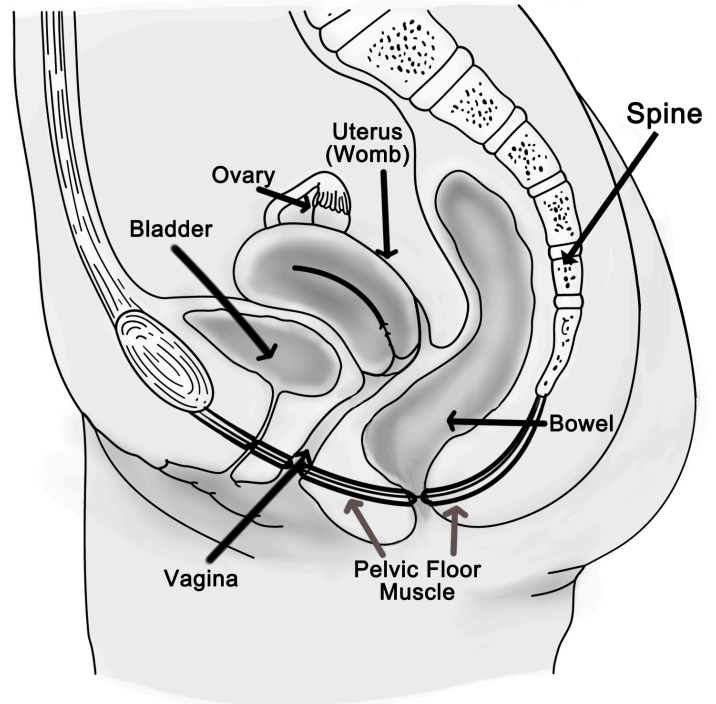
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The pelvic floor muscles

Your pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles that span the outlet of your pelvis. They attach from the pubic bone at the front to the coccyx bone at the back, forming the floor of your pelvis.

The main functions of the pelvic floor are:

- Maintain continence - they control your bladder and bowel by tightly closing the urethra and back passage, preventing incontinence. They also release fully to allow you to empty your bladder or bowel.
- Support - they act like a hammock to support your pelvic organs and keep them in the correct position.
- Sexual function - they can help improve sex by increasing your sensation and your grip.
- Stability - they help to keep your pelvis and hips stable.



Why are my pelvic floor muscles not working properly?

Pelvic floor muscles can become weak, but they can also become too tight or slow to work, just like other muscles in your body.

One of the most common causes of a weak pelvic floor is pregnancy and childbirth. If your job has involved activities such as standing for long periods of time and/or heavy lifting, or you have a long term cough, this may also contribute to weakening your pelvic floor over time.

Weight – if you are overweight, this will place extra strain on your pelvic floor muscles. Losing weight can help improve your symptoms.

Constipation – straining to empty the bowels can also weaken your pelvic floor muscles. If you have problems with constipation you should seek advice. If you find it difficult to empty your bowels, it might be because your pelvic floor doesn't relax properly.

High impact exercise – lifting heavy weights, or participating in exercise that involves jumping, may place excessive strain on your pelvic floor muscles.

How do I do my pelvic floor exercises?

- They can be performed in any position. Find one which is comfortable for you, or which your physiotherapist has recommended. You may find it easier to start off lying down or sitting. As your muscles improve aim to do some of your exercises standing up.
- Try to imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and urine at the same time. You can also think of squeezing tight in the vagina. You should feel your pelvic floor muscles

'squeeze and lift'; try not to squeeze your buttocks and legs. You may feel a gentle tightening in your lower tummy, which are your deep tummy muscles working to help the pelvic floor.

- Breathe normally whilst you do them. It is common to want to hold your breath but try not to. This may be difficult at first but keep trying. Sometimes it helps to count out loud.
- Do not practise stopping the flow of urine mid-stream as this could affect your bladder function in the longer term.

You need to practise both long squeezes and short squeezes and gradually build up your routine. As you do so your muscles will get stronger and your exercise programme will gradually increase.

Long squeezes

- Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles and hold for several seconds, and then relax for several seconds.
- Count how long you can hold your muscles for.
- Repeat your long squeezes until you feel that your muscles are tired and count how many times you are able to repeat the exercise.

Short squeezes

- Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles and then relax.
- Repeat until you feel that your muscles are tired.
- Count how many times you can repeat your short squeezes.

How many pelvic floor exercises should I be doing to help with my symptoms?

At least three times a day. You should complete as many short and long squeezes as you can.

It is highly recommended to have an internal examination from your physiotherapist who will be able to prescribe an individualised programme for your pelvic floor to help with your symptoms. Please see the section below for your physiotherapist to complete.

What else can I do to help my pelvic floor muscles?

'The knack'

When we lift, bend, strain, cough or sneeze, pressure increases in your abdomen. This is called intra-abdominal pressure. The pelvic floor and tummy muscles should naturally brace to ensure your pelvic organs are not pushed down.

Many of us need to re-train our muscles to brace, particularly if our pelvic floor muscle is weak or too slow to work. This is called 'the knack'. You should try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you do anything that may put them under pressure. The knack might help to stop you leaking if you suffer with stress incontinence. If you have a pelvic organ prolapse, it might also help prevent this bulging too much.

I keep forgetting to do my exercises, what should I do?

Make your pelvic floor exercises part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth. You should continue with these exercises for the rest of your life. Some tips to help you remember are:

- Use coloured reminder notes or stickers around the house or at work.
- Use any advert breaks between television programmes.
- Do your exercises sitting on the toilet once you have finished, not during.
- If you have access to a smart phone or tablet computer, you may find it useful to look for free applications to download which can help you train your pelvic floor muscles and act as a reminder.

Personal exercise programme

1. Strong short squeezes:

Practise _____ short squeezes. Remember to relax fully between each squeeze.

2. Strong long squeezes:

Practise holding for _____ seconds.

Relax for a count of _____ seconds.

Repeat _____ times.

3. Gentle long squeezes:

These type of squeezes can help reduce an urge to go to the toilet.

Practise holding at 50% of your full effort for _____ seconds

Relax for _____ seconds.

Repeat _____ times.

Do your exercises in **sitting / laying / standing** (circle as appropriate).

Number of sets to practise per day:

4. Do 'The Knack' whenever coughing, sneezing, bending and lifting.

Progressing your personal exercise programme

As your muscles get stronger or start to release better, it is important to gradually build up your exercises. Your physiotherapist will advise you whether you need to do this by holding each squeeze for more seconds, by doing more squeezes in a row, or by relaxing for a shorter period between each squeeze.

It can take several months for you to notice a difference in how well your muscles work, so please don't give up if you don't notice much change in the first few weeks.

If your physiotherapist needs to make changes to your personal exercise programme, they will write these under 'Additional informatio'n. Please remember to bring this leaflet with you to each appointment.

Additional information

Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

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