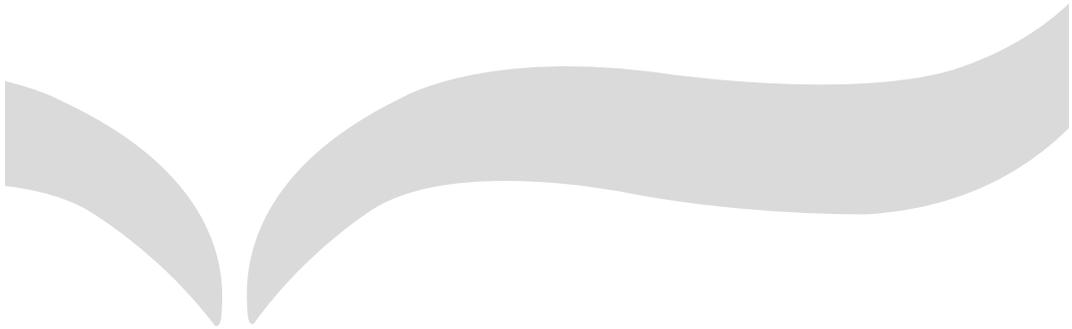


Advice and exercise for women

Your Pelvic Floor Muscles



Hospital:

Phone Number:.....

Introduction

This leaflet tells you how to exercise and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. These muscles form a broad sling running from front to back. They help to hold your pelvic organs in place i.e. your bladder, womb and bowel.

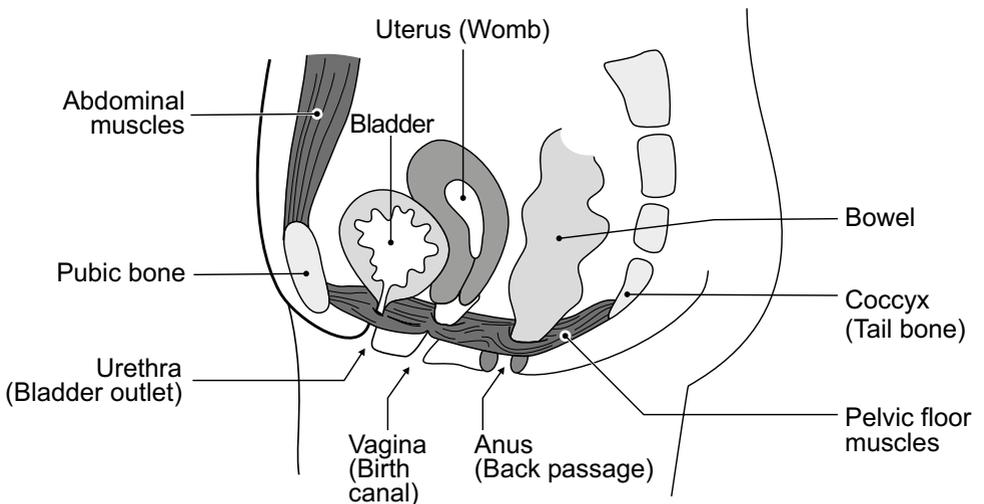
Symptoms

Your pelvic floor muscles need to be strong and firm. If they become weak:

- You might have leakage from your bladder or bowel when you cough, sneeze, laugh, exercise, lift or bend (**stress incontinence**).
- You might have a desperate need to empty your bladder or bowel (**urgency**) or you could sometimes fail to reach the toilet in time (**urge incontinence**).
- You might need to empty your bladder more than eight times each day (**frequency**).

Another problem could be the sensation of something coming down at the vagina or back passage (**prolapse**). Some women can also have loss of sensation during sexual intercourse.

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



The pelvic floor muscles may become weakened by any of the following:

- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Continual straining to empty the bowels
- Being overweight
- Frequent heavy lifting
- Menopausal changes
- Aging
- Chronic cough
- Pelvic surgery
- Long periods of inactivity following injury or illness
- Lack of general fitness
- Some high impact exercises

Pelvic Floor Exercises - The basic exercise

Pelvic floor exercises can improve your symptoms and prevent further problems with your bladder and bowel.

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 the muscles that you would use to stop yourself from passing urine. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing up the back and front passages. This is called 'a pelvic floor contraction'.

Do Not:

- Clench your buttocks
- Squeeze your legs together
- Hold your breath

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

When you go to the toilet **do not** practise stopping your flow of urine mid stream as this may interfere with your normal bladder emptying.

There are many ways you can check you are doing the exercises properly.

- Hold a small mirror so that you can see the area between your legs. Tighten the muscles. The area between your back passage and vagina should move inwards away from the mirror.
- While sitting or lying you can put your hand on the area in between your back passage and vagina and tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should be able to feel movement inwards away from your hand.
- In a comfortable position you can gently insert your thumb or index finger into your vagina. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the muscles draw in around your thumb or finger.
- If you are sexually active, try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles during sexual activity, and ask if your partner can feel it.

It is very important to exercise correctly to help improve your symptoms and avoid making them worse. A specialist pelvic floor physiotherapist can help you.

Your exercise programme

Slow exercises

- 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 the same time
- Relax fully for 4 seconds
- Repeat this until the muscles get tired

How many seconds can you hold for? _____ seconds

How many times could you repeat it? _____ times

Eventually aim for a 10 second hold repeated 10 times.

Remember do not hold your breath as you continue to hold.

Fast exercises

- 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 _____ times.

To strengthen the muscles it is necessary to repeat the slow and fast exercises 3 to 6 times each day.

Your exercise diary is on page 10 of this booklet.

Please note:

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.

Here are some tips to help you remember

Do your exercises:

- After going to the toilet
- During programme breaks on TV
- If you are a new mum, whilst sitting feeding your baby

It may help to set a reminder on your mobile phone. There are a number of pelvic floor exercise apps available. N.B. some are free, others you need to buy.

You should keep doing the exercises for 3-5 months to get the maximum benefit.

Once your pelvic floor muscles become strong it is important to maintain this strength. Try to continue your exercises one to two times a day for the rest of your life. If you do not, then your muscles could become weak again and your symptoms may return.

Additional information

Frequently asked questions

- **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 therefore you should avoid it or try to reduce how much you drink.

Caffeine is present in coffee, tea, cola, irln 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. To avoid constipation make sure you are eating a well balanced diet containing fruit and vegetables and drinking enough fluids.

- **I sometimes leak or feel something coming down when picking up heavy objects. Is there anything I can do to stop this happening?**

Lifting puts a strain on the pelvic floor. It is best to avoid lifting heavy objects. Bend your knees and then tighten your pelvic floor muscles before lifting; hold them tight (brace) until you have finished lifting.

- **Are there any exercises I should avoid?**

You should avoid straight leg sit ups and double leg lifts as they put severe pressure on the pelvic floor (and the back).

Also avoid high impact activity, i.e. any activity involving both feet off the ground at the same time e.g. running, jumping.

Remember:

Liquid intake: You should drink roughly 3 to 4 pints (1.5 to 2 litres) of liquid per day. Drinking less will not reduce your symptoms and it could make matters worse.

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:

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles gently
- Sit on something hard, e.g. the arm of a chair
- Distract your mind (for example, keep busy, make a phone call)

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 fully relax your pelvic floor muscles to help completely empty your bladder without straining.

It can help to:

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

Please turn over for your exercise diary.

Your exercise programme

Slow Contractions		Fast Contractions	
Hold for:	seconds	Repeat:	times
Rest for:	seconds		
Repeat:	times		

Your exercise diary

You might like to use the table below (for the first 4 weeks) to remind you to do your exercises at least times 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							

Week three

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

Week four

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

Leaflet devised by the West of Scotland Continence Physiotherapy
Clinical Effectiveness Group

Next review October 2021



mi • 235600 v2.0