

Rehabilitation Department

A Guide to Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women

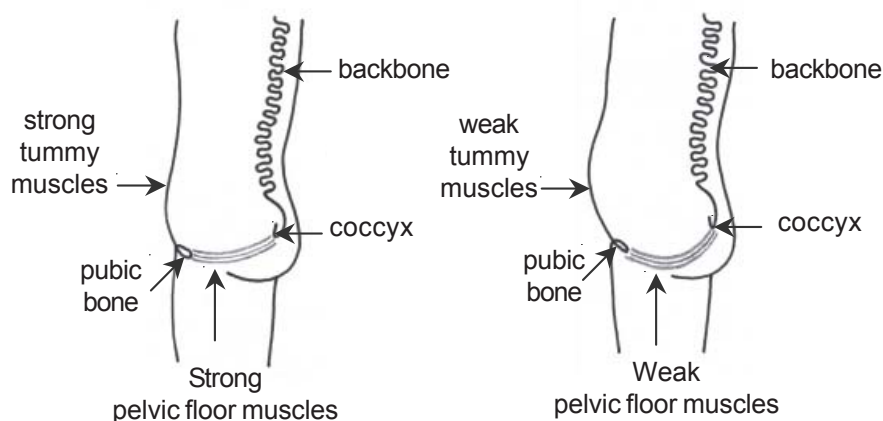
How many people have this problem?

- Over 9 million women in the UK have some form of bladder problem. They may have difficulty controlling their bladder or bowels and leak in their underwear. This can happen when they exercise, laugh or sneeze.
- Many people feel embarrassed and upset with the problem and find it interferes with their lives.

What do the Pelvic Floor Muscles do and where are they?

The pelvic floor muscles help to control when you pass urine (wee) and empty your bowels (poo). These muscles should be firm and strong. If they are weak they will not provide the support and control that they should.

The pelvic floor muscles are just inside your body. They are attached between the bottom of your spine (the coccyx or tail bone) and the bone between your legs (pubic bone). They support the bladder, the womb (uterus) and the bowel.



Why do the Pelvic floor muscles not work properly?

The muscles can be damaged in many ways:

- Damage during pregnancy
- After childbirth
- A chronic or smokers cough
- Lack of general fitness
- Changes due to menopause and age
- Too much lifting heavy things
- Being constipated for a long time
- Being overweight

If your pelvic floor is damaged you may leak urine in your underwear when you:

- Cough
- Laugh
- Blow your nose
- Get up from a chair
- Sneeze
- Exercise
- Lift or bend and stretch

Some people lose control of their bowel and leak faeces (poo) in their underwear. Pelvic floor muscle exercises may help these people too.

The bladder, womb and bowels usually rest on the pelvic floor muscles. They may start to fall down in the pelvis if these muscles are weak. If they push against the walls of the vagina this is called a prolapse.

How should I do pelvic floor muscle exercises?

Choose any comfortable position, with your knees slightly apart. Many people find lying down with their knees bent is a good position to start.

Tighten up your back passage as though you are trying to stop passing wind. Then tighten the muscles that you would use to stop yourself passing urine. Do these 2 together and you should be exercising your pelvic floor muscles

The feeling is one of “squeeze and lift”. Its easy to use the wrong muscles instead of the pelvic floor muscles.

Don't

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

There are a few ways you can check that you are doing the exercises correctly;

- Put 1 or 2 fingers into your vagina. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the muscles move around your fingers.
- Check with a mirror. Hold a small mirror so you can see the area between your legs. Tighten the muscles. The skin between the anus and vagina should move away from the mirror.
- If you are having sex try to exercise your pelvic floor muscles (e.g you can ask your partner if they can feel your muscles tightening).

It is very important to check you are using the right muscles otherwise there might 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. There are specialist physiotherapists and continence advisors who can help you. Both these people have a lot of skill in making your pelvic floor muscles stronger. Pelvic floor muscles work best when you are taught by these experts.

When you have learned these exercises you can do them in sitting, lying or standing. Try to do fast and slow exercises.

Slow exercises:

- Gradually tighten the muscles and hold.
Aim to build up to a maximum of 10 seconds.
This helps the muscles provide support for your bladder and bowel.

Fast exercises

- Tighten and relax the muscles quickly.
This helps the muscle to stop urine leaking when you cough, laugh or exercise.

You are now ready to do a pelvic floor workout.

The Pelvic Floor Exercise Programme

Now that you can do the basic exercise you can build up the endurance of the muscles so that will work harder and longer. Firstly, you need to determine your 'starting block'.

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as previously described and hold for as long as you can (maximum = 10 seconds).

How many seconds can you hold for?

Relax the contraction and rest for 5 – 10 seconds.

Then repeat the 'tighten, hold and relax' movement as many times as you can (maximum = 10).

How many times can you repeat this?

This is your 'starting block'.

Now perform the basic exercise but squeeze and lift more firmly, and let go straight away.

This is called a quick contraction and will help your muscles react quickly when you cough, sneeze or lift, etc.

How many quick contractions can you do?

Aim to increase this to a maximum of 10.

You should try to repeat your starting block and quick contractions at least 3 times a day. Your starting block will change as the muscles get stronger; therefore re-assess this every few weeks.

Also try to remember to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you cough, sneeze or lift.

Pelvic floor muscles are like any other muscles. You need to practise exercising them to get full strength. The muscles may get tired at first and it may be hard to exercise as much as this. Don't worry. Do as much as you can. Try to do a little more each time.

How will I know if I'm getting better?

You would expect fewer leaks in your underwear after about 3 months of exercising. Get help if there has been no improvement after 3 months. You may need to exercise up to 6 months before you see an improvement.

How will I remember to do the exercises

It can be hard to remember. Choose something that you do 4 times a day and do your pelvic floor exercises every time you do this activity. For example whenever you switch on the kettle or meal times.

When your muscles become stronger you should stop leaking urine. You must still do the workout once a day for the rest of your life or the muscles will become weak again.

What if I don't improve?

Some people do need more help. It is very easy to get treatment and advice from a continence advisor or specialist physiotherapist. Our contact details are on the back of this leaflet. You can speak to your doctor first or ring the clinic and refer yourself.

In the clinic you would be asked questions such as:

- How often do you pass urine?
- How often do you leak?
- When do you leak?
- What do you normally drink?

After you have been assessed there may be other things to try such as:

- Pelvic floor physiotherapy
- Electrical stimulation of the muscles
- Vaginal weights
- Bladder training

Look after your bladder and Bowels

- Have at least 8 drinks a day. Don't have drinks that contain sugar.
- Avoid too many brown drinks such as tea, coffee, chocolate, cola. These have caffeine in them and can irritate the bladder.
- If you smoke try to stop.
- Try to keep to a normal weight.
- Eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day and avoid getting constipated.
- When you sit on the toilet keep your feet on the floor and relax.
- Never stop and start when you are having a wee.
- Don't go to the toilet just in case. Only go when your bladder feels full.

Helpful Addresses:

The Continenence Foundation

www.continenence-foundation.org.uk

Contact: info@continenence-foundation.org.uk

Bladder and Bowel Foundation

Bladder and Bowel Community,
7 The Court,

Holywell Business Park, Northfield Road,
Southam, CV47 0FS

Telephone No: (01926) 357220

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence (ERIC)

Offering information and advice to children with wetting and soiling, and their carers.

ERIC

36 Old School House, Britannia Road
Kingswood BS15 8DB

Telephone No: 0845 370 8008

www.eric.org.uk

Teenage website www.trusteric.org

PROMOCON

Promoting Continence and Product Awareness.

Disabled Living

Burrows House, 10 Priestley Road
Wardley Industrial Estate, Worsley

Manchester M28 2LY

Helpline 0161 607 8219

www.promocon.co.uk

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Locality Manager
Rehabilitation Department
Calderdale Royal Hospital
Telephone (01422) 224198

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

ਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਪ੍ਰਾਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ,
ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਵਿਭਾਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

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برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

"إذا احتجت الحصول على هذه المعلومة بشكل مغاير أو مترجمة إلى لغة مختلفة فيرجى منك الاتصال بالقسم
المذكور أعلاه"