



# Essential Pelvic Floor Exercises



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## Essential Pelvic Floor Exercises

The need to exercise the pelvic floor muscles is not always apparent until women experience bladder problems following childbirth, or men report difficulties following surgery on their prostate or bladder.

This leaflet is designed to assist you in helping yourself, whether you are male or female, whatever your age.

### What are the pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor muscles are the muscles that help support your bladder and bowel, and in ladies the uterus too.

The pelvic floor muscle is attached at the front to the pubic bone and at the rear to the inside surface of the coccyx (base of the spine).

There are several layers of muscle which play a vital role in helping to control the bladder and bowel function.

### What does the pelvic floor do?

- It helps to support your pelvic organs and the contents of your abdomen
- It supports your bladder helping you to stay dry when you cough or sneeze
- It helps you to control wind and to 'hold on' with your bowels
- It also helps to increase sexual awareness and satisfaction during intercourse

### Possible symptoms?

- Stress Incontinence, such as leakage when coughing or exercising
- Urgency and Urge Incontinence, where you struggle to get to the toilet in time
- Poor bowel control
- Discomfort around the pelvic floor area, which could be a sign of a prolapse



When a muscle is not exercised it will weaken through lack of use and the pelvic floor muscles are no exception.

## What causes the pelvic floor muscle to weaken?

A weak pelvic floor can be caused by:

- A long history of constipation
- Persistent straining when opening the bowel
- Nerve damage to the muscle following surgery or accident
- Repeatedly lifting very heavy objects
- Being overweight or generally unfit
- A persistent cough e.g. bronchitis, asthma, allergic reactions causing a cough
- For women, the strain of childbirth particularly if the baby is over 8lbs in weight

## How do I do pelvic floor exercises?

### Instructions for both men and women

You can do pelvic floor exercises anywhere and at any time, lying down, sitting or standing. If you have just had surgery and your pelvic floor is very weak, you will find lying or sitting a lot easier to start with.

1. Slow contractions: tighten the muscles around your back and front passage and lift up inside as if trying to stop passing wind and urine at the same time
2. Try holding the squeeze as long and as hard as you can, building up to a maximum of 10 seconds. (If you cannot manage this, try 5 seconds and this will improve with time and patience)
3. Rest for the amount of time you held the contraction, then repeat as many times as you can up to a maximum of 10 contractions
4. Quick contractions: draw up the pelvic floor and then relax immediately. Being able to work these muscles quickly will help them to deal with the sudden stresses of coughing or laughing
5. Do these steadily for a maximum of 10 times
6. Try to do one set of slow contractions (10) followed by one set of quick contractions (10) 2 to 3 times each day

When you have mastered the art of these exercises, remember they are for life, continue with your exercise regime even when your symptoms have improved or even disappeared.



## Hints for Men

If you are unsure that you are exercising the correct muscles, practice naked in front of a mirror. Squeeze the muscles as if trying to stop the flow of urine or stopping the passing of wind. You should observe a lift at the base of the penis and scrotum, which will indicate that you are using the correct muscles.

### How often should I exercise my pelvic floor muscles if they are weak?

It is advisable to do your pelvic floor exercises properly 2 to 3 times a day. Like any other muscle, they will tire if used excessively in which case you may find that your symptoms are worse later in the day. This does not mean you should stop exercising, just do them regularly and sensibly.

### How many exercises should I do at once?

It is advisable to do both slow and quick contraction exercises, up to 10 of each whenever you exercise. However, make sure you do not:

- Pull in your tummy
- Squeeze your legs together
- Tighten your buttocks
- Hold your breath

### Remember, prevention is better than cure

It costs nothing to do these exercises, you just need to remember to do them daily.

If you are concerned and feel you need further professional input, these can be individually devised for you by a specialist nurse or specialist physiotherapist.

**Please don't be frightened to ask for help if you need it. You are not alone!**



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