

Physiotherapy department

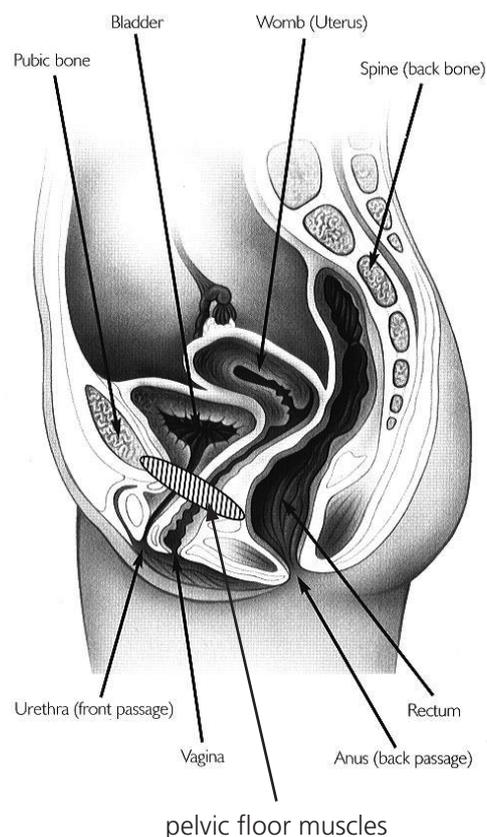
Pelvic floor exercises for women

Introduction

Some women experience leakage of urine during exercise, laughing, coughing or sneezing. They may also find they are not able to get to the toilet on time to empty the bladder or bowel. This is known as stress incontinence and is caused by weakness in the pelvic floor muscles. It is important to maintain the strength of these muscles in order to prevent problems occurring or to increase their strength when problems do occur eg. damage to the muscles as a result of childbirth, long periods of inactivity due to illness, pelvic surgery, weakness of the muscles as a result of constipation, chronic cough, being overweight, persistent heavy lifting. This leaflet tells you how to exercise and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.

What are the pelvic floor muscles?

Your pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles that stretch like a broad sling from your tail bone at the back to your pubic bone at the front and as their name suggests they form the floor of the pelvis. They help support the pelvic organs ie. bladder, uterus and rectum and to control the outlets from the pelvic organs ie. urethra, vagina and anus. Like all muscles in the body, the pelvic floor muscles will respond to regular exercise and become stronger.



Identifying your pelvic floor muscles

It is important to exercise your pelvic floor muscles to help your bladder and bowel control. It may also improve your sex life. To do this, you need to make sure you are working the right muscles in the right way.

Sit or lie in a comfortable position with your legs slightly apart. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and at the same time trying to stop yourself from passing urine mid-stream. It should feel like a 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing up the back and front passages. This is called a **pelvic floor contraction**.

It is important to do this without tightening your tummy, squeezing your legs together, tightening your buttocks or holding your breath. No one should be able to notice you doing your exercises.

How to exercise the pelvic floor muscles

Now that you can identify your pelvic floor muscles, you are ready to start your own individual exercise programme.

First, you need to establish your '**starting block**'.

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold the contraction for as many seconds as you can (up to a maximum of 10 seconds).

1. How long can you hold the contraction?
Now release the contraction and rest for 5 seconds.
Repeat this contraction as many times as you can.

secs

2. How many times can you repeat the contraction?
(Do not exceed 12 repetitions)

reps

Now you have established your **starting block**.

	secs		reps
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As a result of this muscle training your pelvic floor will get stronger and you can increase both your contraction time and the number of repetitions.

3. To prevent leakage of urine when coughing or sneezing, your pelvic floor muscles need to react quickly. Repeat the basic exercise but do not hold the contraction.
How many quick contractions can you do?

reps

Aim to repeat your **starting block** and **quick contractions** 4-5 times a day.

The most difficult part about doing your exercises is remembering to do them! Remind yourself by putting stickers in obvious places eg. fridge, telephone, wearing your watch on the wrong wrist or exercise **after** emptying your bladder. You can do your exercises in whatever position you find comfortable eg. sitting, standing, lying down.

For an **occasional check** to see how strong the muscles are becoming, try stopping the flow of urine mid-stream **once a week only** (but not if you have a urinary tract infection). This should become easier the stronger your muscles become.

General advice

- You should drink approximately 3-4 pints of liquid a day. Do not restrict your intake; it will not reduce your symptoms, in fact, it could make matters worse.
- Be patient. Improvements in your pelvic floor strength may take from 3-6 months.
- Do not drink too much tea or coffee. Caffeine can irritate your bladder.
- Avoid lifting heavy objects. The strain can increase the pressure on your bladder and cause leakage. If you do need to lift a heavy object remember to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you lift and hold it tight until you have lowered the load.
- Try to avoid putting on weight. Obesity puts a strain on the pelvic floor muscles.
- It is important to completely empty the bladder each time you go to the toilet without straining. Urine left inside the bladder may irritate the bladder lining causing inflammation. It may help to lean forward as you pass urine.
- Try to tighten and hold the pelvic floor muscles prior to sneezing, coughing etc. This will improve your control and reduce leakage of urine.

Further help

If your problems persist despite doing the exercises, contact your GP who may be able to refer you to a continence advisor.

You may find it helpful to contact the:

Bladder and Bowel Foundation Helpline
SATRA Innovation Park
Rockingham Road
Kettering
Northants
NN16 9JH

Helpline: **0845 345 0165**

General enquiries: **01536 533255**

Fax: **01536 533240**

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

