



**University Hospitals Birmingham**  
NHS Foundation Trust



# **Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women**

**Building healthier lives**

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# Introduction

Many women suffer from weakness of their pelvic floor muscles.

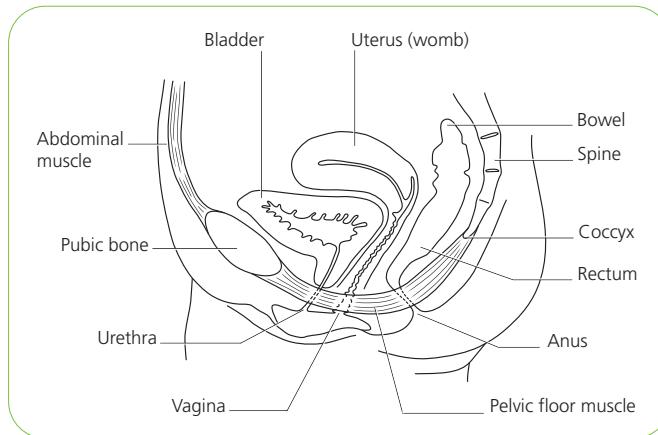
## Common symptoms include:

- Leaking urine with activity i.e. running, jumping, coughing and sneezing
- A sudden and urgent need to pass urine
- Leakage of stool from the back passage

## What do the pelvic floor muscles do?

The pelvic floor muscles are a supportive sling of muscles. They stretch from the tailbone at the back to the pubic bone at the front. They are responsible for:

- Supporting the pelvic organs, bladder and bowel, especially when standing. They also protect them from external damage.
- Your pelvic floor muscles contract when you cough, sneeze or laugh and prevent leakage of urine.
- There are two types of muscle fibre in your pelvic floor muscle, slow acting and fast acting muscle.



## The Female Pelvic Floor

## What causes pelvic floor weakness?

- Long-term catheter
- Constipation/straining to empty your bowels
- Chronic cough
- Being overweight
- Pelvic trauma
- Repeated heavy lifting

**Pelvic floor muscles can be strengthened just like any other weak or damaged muscle. They need to be exercised regularly to work well.**

## How to exercise your pelvic floor muscles

- Sit, stand or lie comfortable with your knees slightly apart.
- Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind around your back passage by squeezing. At the same time, imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing urine by lifting the muscle up to the front of the pelvic bone. Slowly squeeze and lift the muscles up towards your abdomen.
- A feeling of gentle tightening in your lower abdomen is normal. Try to avoid pulling in your stomach, squeezing your legs together, tightening your buttocks or holding your breath. This will help to ensure only your pelvic floor muscles are working.

## Exercise programme

First you need to find your starting point.

## Slow acting muscle fibres

This exercise will build the endurance of the muscles (they will work harder and for longer).

- To do this, tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold the contraction for as many seconds as you can.

### How long can you hold the contraction?

.....seconds

- Release the contraction and rest for the same time. Repeat the tightening, hold, release, as many times as you can.

### How many times can you repeat the contraction?

.....times

- As you improve, you will notice that you can hold the contraction for longer and do more repetitions, compared to your starting point.

## Fast acting muscle fibres

When laughing, coughing and sneezing, your muscles need to be able to react quickly. It is also important to practice quick contractions.

- To do this, tighten the muscles quickly as before but do not hold the contraction this time.

### How many contractions can you do?

.....times

- Aim to increase the number of repetitions of slow and quick exercises over the next six months. You need to practice these every day as many times as you can. The more you do the stronger it gets.

**The most difficult part of the programme is remembering to do the exercises. The tips below may help to trigger your memory:**

- Put coloured stickers or dots in places that will catch your eye and remind you to do them (your watch, kettle, fridge etc.)
- Set an alarm on your phone/watch/alarm
- Exercise after every time you have been to the bathroom
- Exercise whilst waiting for the kettle to boil or when you wash your hands
- Exercise every time the adverts come on the television

## **Further useful tips:**

1. **Movement changes:** try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing and laughing. This will help to prevent leakage.
2. **Avoid constipation:** straining to open your bowels stretches the pelvic floor muscles, making them weaker. It is important to drink plenty of fluids and you may need to adjust your diet.
3. **Drink enough fluids:** reduce your caffeine intake. These drinks may irritate your bladder. Try to drink more water. Aim for three to four pints (2 litres) a day. Do not restrict your fluid intake unless required for medical reasons.
4. **Exercises to avoid if your pelvic floor muscles are weak:** double leg lifts, straight leg sit ups, repetitive heavy lifting, high impact exercises such as jumping and running. These all put stress on your pelvic floor muscle.
5. **Maintain a healthy weight:** maintaining the correct weight can make a big difference to your symptoms, by reducing the strain on the muscles.

## Bladder emptying

It is important to empty your bladder completely each time you go to the toilet. Take your time. If you think your bladder may not be completely empty, try rocking your pelvis forwards and backwards. This may help to empty it a little more.

## Passing a motion

Use a small footstool to put your feet on so that your knees are higher than your hips and do not strain as this will put extra pressure on your pelvic floor muscle.

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.

## How did we do? ☺ ☹ ☹

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