

## Department of Urology

# Pelvic Floor Exercises for Men

Men experience a variety of problems with their urinary system, leading to unwanted leakage of urine. Some also have difficulty controlling wind or leakage from the bowels. Often this is due to a weakness of the muscles of the pelvic floor. These muscles have an important function in preventing these troublesome conditions. In particular pelvic floor exercises can be effective following surgery on the prostate and when men experience a dribble after passing water.

### What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is made up of layers of muscle and other tissues. These stretch from side to side like a hammock and are attached to your tailbone (coccyx) at the back and your pubic bone at the front. The urethra (water pipe) and rectum (back passage) pass through the pelvic floor muscles. The hammock of the muscle supports the bladder and the bowel and plays an important role in bladder and bowel control.

### Why do the pelvic floor muscles become weak?

The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened by some operations on the prostate gland. Also straining to empty your bowels due to constipation, chronic coughs, being overweight and a lack of general fitness and persistent heavy lifting can affect your pelvic floor muscles. Furthermore, neurological damage such as a stroke, spinal injury or multiple sclerosis can also cause poor pelvic muscle function.

### What are pelvic floor exercises?

You can improve control of your bladder and bowel by doing exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. These can also be useful when used with a bladder retraining program that aims to improve your bladder control if you need to pass urine urgently and frequently.



## Patient Information

### Identifying the pelvic floor muscles

- Sit or lie comfortably with the muscles of your thighs, buttocks and abdomen relaxed.
- Tighten the ring of muscle around the back passage as if you are trying to control diarrhoea or wind and then relax it. Practice this movement several times until you are sure that you are exercising the right muscle. Try not to squeeze your buttocks or tighten your thighs or tummy muscles.
- Imagine you are passing water, trying to stop the flow mid stream and restarting it. (You can do this for real if you wish, but do so only to learn which muscles are the correct ones to use. Otherwise it may interfere with normal bladder emptying). Each time you tighten your pelvic floor muscles you may feel the base of your penis move up slightly towards your abdomen.

### Doing your pelvic floor exercises

Now you can feel the pelvic muscles working, you can start to exercise them.

- Tighten and draw in the muscles around the anus and the urethra (water pipe). Lift them up inside. Imagine you are going up in a lift to the fourth floor! Try and hold this contraction as strongly as you can. Count to five. Release slowly descending in the lift and relax. You should have a definite feeling of letting go but do not crash your lift!
- Repeat (squeeze and lift) and relax. It is important to rest between each contraction. Once you can easily hold the contraction for 5 seconds, increase it gradually to 10 seconds.
- Repeat this as many times as you are able up to a maximum of 50 to 100 times during the day. Try to make each tightening a strong, slow and controlled contraction.
- Do this exercise routine in varying positions - lying, standing or walking.

Whilst doing the exercises **do not** hold your breath, tighten your tummy, buttocks or thighs or push down. Instead squeeze and lift up.

### Make the exercises a daily routine

Once you have learnt these exercises they should be done regularly. You may wish to tighten your pelvic floor muscles while you are getting up from your chair, coughing or lifting. Some men find that tightening the pelvic

## Patient Information

floor muscles before they undertake such activities can help them regain control. These exercises can help you gain control of your bladder soon after surgery. Good results take time.

You will probably not notice an improvement for several weeks and you will not reach your maximum performance for a few months. When you have recovered control of your bladder or bowel you should continue doing the exercises twice a day for life.

### Tips to help your pelvic floor

- Do your exercises well
- The quality is important
- Avoid constipation
- Keep weight within the right range for your age and height.
- Share the lifting of heavy loads.

### Further Information

For further information please contact Debbie Shreeve Clinical Nurse Specialist in Urology on 024 7696 5373.

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