

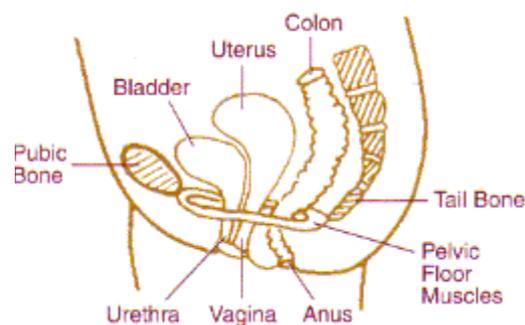
Department of Urology

Pelvic floor exercises for women

Pelvic floor exercises are a simple and effective way to combat incontinence (loss of bladder control). They help to restore muscle tone through exercise.

What is the pelvic floor?

The floor of the pelvis is made up of layers of muscle and other tissues. These layers stretch like a hammock from the tail bone at the back to the pubic bone in the front. A women's pelvic floor supports the bladder, the uterus (womb) and bowel. The urethra (water pipe), the vagina (birth canal) and rectum (back passage) pass through the pelvic floor muscles. The pelvic floor muscles play an important role in bladder and bowel control and sexual sensation.



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 programme that aims to improve your bladder control if you need to pass urine urgently and frequently.



Why do the pelvic floor muscles get weak?

The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened by:

- pregnancy and childbirth
- constipation (continual straining)
- persistent heavy lifting
- a chronic cough
- being overweight
- changes in hormone levels at menopause (change of life)

Identifying the pelvic floor muscles

This is so you can get your pelvic floor muscles working correctly:

- 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).
- If you cannot feel a definite squeeze and lift action of your pelvic floor or are unable to slow the stream of urine, you should seek professional help.

Doing your pelvic floor exercises

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

- Tightening and drawing in around the anus, the vagina and urethra all at once lifting them **up** inside. Try to hold the contraction strongly as you count to five and then relax. You should have a definite feeling of letting go.

Patient Information

- Repeat (squeeze and lift for a count of 5) and relax. It is important to relax for about 10 seconds in between each contraction. If you find it easy to hold for a count of 5, try to hold for longer – up to 10 seconds.
- Repeat this as many times as you are able up to a maximum of 8-10 squeezes.
- Now do five to ten short, fast, but strong contractions, pulling up and immediately letting go.
- Do this exercise routine at least 4-5 times every day. You can do it in varying positions: lying, standing or walking.
- Whilst doing the exercises don't hold your breath, tighten your tummy, buttocks or thighs or push down. Instead squeeze and lift up.

Make the exercises a daily routine

Get into the habit of doing the exercises. Link doing them to some everyday activities – for example, do them after you have passed water or when you turn on a tap. Or keep a simple exercise diary. Get into the habit of tightening these muscles prior to activities that are likely to make you leak – such as getting up from the chair, coughing, sneezing or lifting

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