



University Hospitals Bristol **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information service
St Michael's Hospital

Pelvic floor exercises

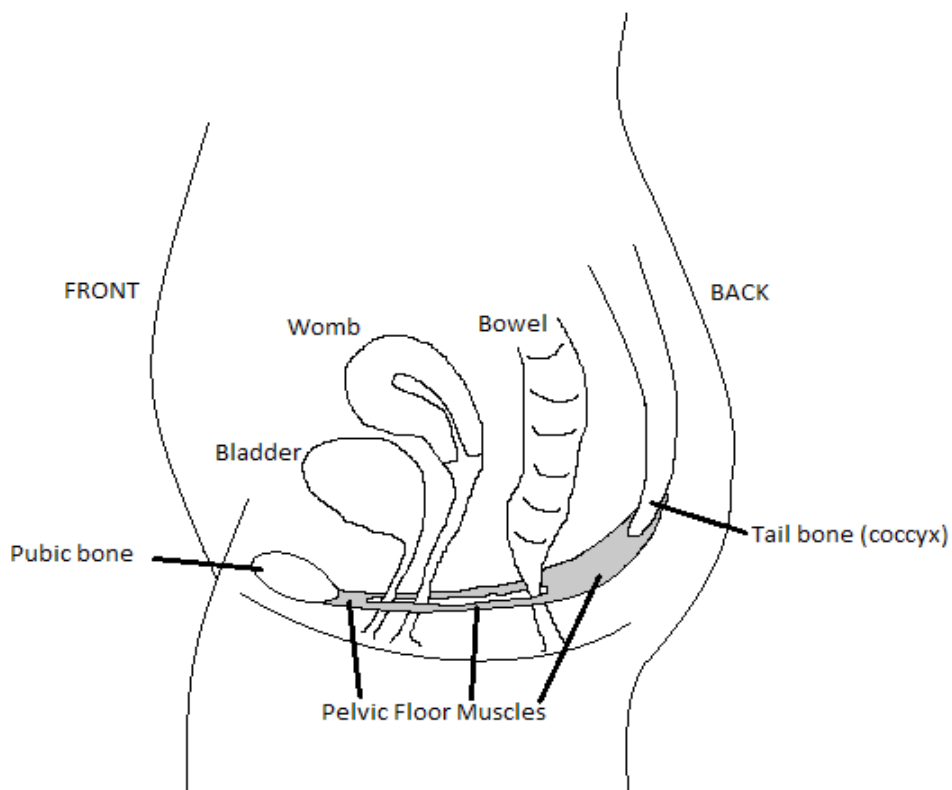


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The pelvic floor forms a sling of muscles which are attached to the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis and the tail bone (coccyx) at the back. They have three openings – one at the front from the bladder, one in the middle from the birth canal (vagina), and one at the back from the bowel (rectum).

Pelvic floor



The pelvic floor muscles support your pelvic organs (the bladder, uterus and bowel) and control the outlets from the pelvic organs (the urethra, vagina and anus). If they become weak, you may develop a prolapse (when your internal organs sag), or you may wet yourself when you cough, sneeze or run.

It is important for all women to practise pelvic floor exercises on a regular basis. Like any other muscles in the body, if you exercise them, they will become stronger and more responsive. Regular exercise can help prevent problems developing, and if you are experiencing any problems with bladder control or prolapse, then exercise may help to relieve your symptoms.

How to find your pelvic floor

Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine midstream. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing up the back and front passages.

Important

The feeling is 'lift' – you should never be pushing down.

Do not:

- tighten your buttocks
- hold your breath
- squeeze your legs together.

There are two exercises for the pelvic floor

1. To strengthen them for support:

- squeeze and lift
- hold for as long as you can (up to 10 seconds)
- release and rest for several seconds
- repeat the above as many times as you can, up to a maximum of 10 repetitions at a time
- you may find your lower tummy muscle working at the same time as your pelvic floor.

Try to practise this exercise at least three times a day.

2. To teach them to react quickly to stop you leaking when you cough or sneeze:

- pull up and tighten hard and quickly, then relax
- do this several times – to a maximum of 10

Practise this exercise at least three times a day.

Further advice

You can practise your exercises anywhere, any time and in any position – sitting, standing or lying down. It is important to do them regularly, so it helps to associate them with activities you do regularly every day, such as boiling a kettle, waiting for a bus, at red traffic lights, or after (not whilst) you empty your bladder.

These exercises are sometimes called the “secret exercise” as no one can see you doing them!

When you have improved your muscles, you should aim to do them at least once or twice a day (for example when you clean your teeth) ... forever!

Helpful advice

1. If you have had a problem it may be three to six months before you see an improvement, so keep practising.
2. To prevent leakage of urine, tighten the muscles before you cough, sneeze, or lift a heavy object.
3. Being overweight puts a strain on the pelvic floor.
4. Chronic constipation and straining also puts a strain on the pelvic floor. If you find it difficult to go, make a pad of toilet paper and support your perineum. Raising your feet on a small foot rest can often help.
5. Drink about three pints of fluid a day. Do not reduce your fluid intake, as this is harmful to your bladder.
6. Avoid going to the toilet 'just in case', as this reduces the capacity of the bladder. If you go more often than every two hours (known as frequency), then train your bladder to wait longer. If you feel the urge to empty your bladder soon after having done so, try delaying techniques:
 - tighten your pelvic floor
 - sit on something hard such as the arm of a chair
 - distract your mind – for example hum a tune, count up to 10 again and again.

It will also help if you avoid drinks containing caffeine, for example coffee, tea and cola.

7. It is important to completely empty your 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. Also, sit on the seat – don't 'hover' over it.

8. Straight leg sit ups and double leg lifts put severe pressure on the pelvic floor (and the back) and should not be done. Also, until your muscles are a lot stronger, avoid any activity with high impact (anything involving both feet off the ground at the same time).

Important

If you are still not sure that you are doing the basic exercise correctly, or if your problems continue, then make sure that you seek further medical advice. Your GP can refer you to a gynaecologist, urologist or a professional who specialises in teaching pelvic floor exercises.

Please note that if for any reason you would value a second opinion concerning your diagnosis or treatment, you are entirely within your rights to request this.

The first step would usually be to discuss this with the doctor or other lead clinician who is responsible for your care.

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