



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Pelvic Floor Exercises

Issued by Physiotherapy Department

The Purpose

This leaflet explains about the pelvic floor muscles and how to exercise them.

The Benefits

Practising pelvic floor exercises will help you strengthen the support for your bladder, bowel and all the contents of your pelvis. Strong pelvic floor muscles help to prevent leaking when you sneeze and cough and are needed to help to reduce urgency. It is realistic to expect to practise pelvic floor exercises for at least 12 to 20 weeks initially and to continue with a maintenance programme of exercises long term.

The Risks

Muscles become weaker when they are not exercised regularly. This can lead to symptoms such as stress incontinence of urine and prolapse.

What is the Pelvic Floor?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles and connective tissue which support the bladder, uterus (women) and bowel. The outlets from these organs, the urethra from the bladder, the vagina from the uterus (womb) and the anus from the bowel pass through the pelvic floor.

What do the pelvic floor muscles do?

The pelvic floor supports the pelvic organs to prevent problems such as:

- Incontinence (the involuntary loss of urine or faeces): The most common being leakage when extra pressure is put on the bladder whilst laughing, sneezing, coughing or taking part in physical activities.
- Overactive bladder: Involuntary leakage following a sudden desire to pass water.

- Prolapse (poor support of the pelvic organs): A lump/bulge may be felt in the vagina. This can cause difficulty emptying the bladder or bowel, discomfort or a lack of sensation during intercourse or a dragging feeling in the vagina.

Diagram of female pelvic contents

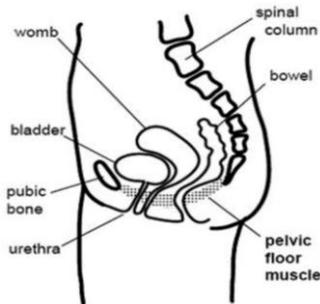
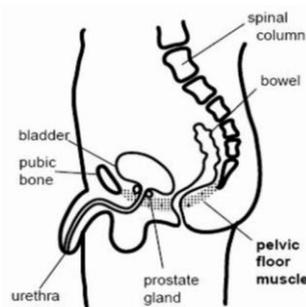


Diagram of male pelvic contents



What can cause a weak pelvic floor?

Some of the common causes of incontinence are associated with:

- pregnancy and childbirth
- being overweight
- straining to empty the bowels
- persistent heavy lifting
- smoking
- excessive coughing
- changes in hormone levels at menopause and just growing older.

How do I strengthen my pelvic floor muscles?

It is recommended that everyone exercise their pelvic floor muscles regularly throughout life to prevent or correct weakness.

Pelvic Floor exercises

Step 1

Pelvic floor exercises can be practised in any position – sitting, standing or lying.

Step 2

Concentrate on where your pelvic floor muscles are positioned in the pelvis and imagine trying to stop yourself from passing urine, squeezing your vaginal muscles as though gripping (women) and at the same time trying to stop yourself passing wind from your back passage.

Perform a squeeze and lift of the pelvic floor muscles drawing up the front and back passages.

It is important to continue to breathe normally when contracting your muscles and not hold your breath. You may also find your lower abdominal muscles work at the same time.

Slow contractions

- Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles
- Hold as long as you can (eventually to a count of 10)
- Slowly release and relax for a few seconds
- Repeat as many times as you can (up to a maximum of 10).

Fast contractions

- Squeeze and lift the muscles hard and fast
- Slowly release
- Repeat as many times as you can (up to a maximum of 10).

Submaximal contractions

Imagine your pelvic floor is like a lift which can go up to a maximum of 10 floors.

- Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles up to the third floor
- Hold this squeeze as long as you can up to 30 seconds
- Remember to keep breathing while doing this exercise
- Repeat 2 or 3 times.

The more you practice your exercises, the quicker you will see results, but try to practice your exercises at least 3 times per day.

Helpful tip

It is important to pull up your pelvic floor muscles **as far as you can** and draw in the muscles of your lower abdomen before and during coughing and sneezing.

During everyday activities it is also recommended that you tighten your pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles submaximally.

How can a woman check that she is doing a correct pelvic floor muscle contraction?

- Use a mirror to view the area between your vagina and back passage – you should see an up and inward movement when you contract your pelvic floor muscles. If you see a bulge this is not the correct action – stop and seek professional advice.
- Place your finger tips on the area of skin between your vagina and back passage, when you contract your pelvic floor muscles you should feel the muscle lift upwards from your finger tips.
- Ask your sexual partner: can they feel the muscle squeezing during sexual activity?

How can a man check that he is doing a correct pelvic floor muscles contraction?

- Place your finger tips on the area of skin behind your scrotum. When you contract your pelvic floor muscles you should feel the muscle lift upwards from your fingertips.
- You should be able to see a slight lift of your scrotum and the penis moving towards your abdomen.

Are there alternative treatments?

There are no alternatives as the only way to strengthen muscle is by exercise.

Other advice

- Avoid putting on weight.
- Avoid constipation by having a balanced diet to include at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Do not strain to empty your bowels.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine if you have problems with urgency. Drink 2 litres of fluid a day.
- It is not advisable to stop midstream when passing urine as an exercise.
- Check your bladder is completely empty by leaning forward as you finish urinating.
- Avoid high impact exercises at the gym.
- Try to avoid emptying your bladder too frequently as this can reduce its capacity. Try to defer an urge to pass water by:
 1. Tightening your pelvic floor.
 2. Sit on something hard.
 3. Distract your mind e.g. count backwards from 50 to 1.

Seek further help by consulting a Women's Health Physiotherapist or a Continence nurse.

Contact numbers

Physiotherapy departments

North Tyneside General Hospital	03 44 811 8111 ext 4064
Wansbeck General Hospital	03 44 811 8111 ext 6010
Hexham General Hospital	03 44 811 8111 ext 5031
Alnwick Infirmary	03 44 811 8111 ext 6787
Berwick Infirmary	03 44 811 8111 ext 6643

Sources of Information

Sources, other than the Trust where information can be obtained:

National organisations that may be of help:

Continence Foundation/The Bladder & Bowel Foundation (B&BF)

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

PromoCon 0161 607 8219

www.promocon.co.uk

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

PIN 431/V7

Review date: February 2022

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