

Helpful Tips

- Avoid constipation. Straining to empty your bowel may make bladder and bowel problems worse. It is important to sit relaxed on the toilet seat with your feet supported and knees higher than your hips.
- Avoid tea, coffee and cola. These contain caffeine and may irritate the bladder.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing or lifting.
- If you are overweight, losing weight helps in reducing extra strain on the pelvic floor muscles.
- Avoid lifting heavy weights.
- It can take three to five months before you notice an improvement. Therefore, it is important to be persistent.

For further information or advice, please contact:

The Continence Advisory Service (East Berkshire)
Telephone: 01753 638489

The Continence Advisory Service (West Berkshire)
Telephone: 0118 949 5145 / 5146



www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk

Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is committed to the eight principles of the data Protection Act 1998. We have implemented technology and security policies, rules and measures to protect the personal data that we have under our control from: unauthorised access, improper use, alteration, unlawful or accidental destruction. For further information please contact the Data Protection Officer, 2nd/3rd Floor, Fitzwilliam House, Skimped Hill Lane, Bracknell, RG12 1LD.

Pelvic Muscle Exercises

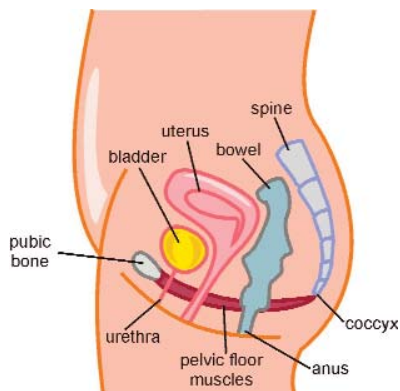
From the Continence Advisory Service



Pelvic floor muscle exercises are a very effective method of treatment for women with bladder problems, in particular, stress incontinence. This is caused by a weak muscle which allows urine to leak when you cough, sneeze, laugh, or do exercise such as running or jumping.

Where is your pelvic floor?

Your pelvic floor is a set of muscles that reaches from your pubic bone at the front to your coccyx at the base of your spine.



They form squeezing muscles around the anus, vagina and urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder) and are the muscles you use when you want to stop yourself passing urine or wind.

Why is it important to do pelvic floor exercises?

Exercises help to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. A strong pelvic floor will help to prevent urinary and bowel incontinence by supporting your bladder, uterus and bowel allowing them to

function normally. It can also help to improve your sex life.

What causes a weak pelvic floor?

There are many causes of a weak pelvic floor including:

- childbirth
- constipation
- chronic coughing
- menopause
- pregnancy
- poor fitness
- constipation
- being overweight.

As a consequence, some people experience leakage of urine during activities such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, lifting and exercising. This is described as stress urinary incontinence.

Others experience sudden urges to pass urine and may leak urine before they get to the toilet. This is described as urge incontinence. Exercising the pelvic floor muscles is helpful in both of these conditions.

How do I know which muscle to exercise?

If you don't know where your pelvic floor is, you can find it by imagining you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time stopping your flow of urine. Or you can put your thumb just inside your vagina facing towards the back; you should feel the muscle move around your thumb. The muscles you use to do this are your pelvic floor muscles.

How do I exercise the muscles?

You must do fast and slow exercises to make your pelvic floor muscles stronger. It is important to learn to do the exercises in the right way and to check from time to time that you are still doing them correctly.

Slow exercises

You should sit comfortably with your knees slightly apart. Squeeze as if you are trying to stop passing wind and at the same time are trying to stop passing urine. The muscles should feel as though they 'lift and squeeze'. Do not use your tummy muscles or your bottom when you are doing this exercise. Your buttocks and legs should not move at all.

Hold for as long as you can – up to six seconds. You may not be able to hold it for more than two or three seconds at first. Repeat this up to 10 times, but have a rest in between each one for three or four seconds.

Fast exercises

It is also important to work the pelvic floor muscles to react quickly to stop you leaking when you cough or sneeze. Therefore, practice tightening your pelvic floor quickly and then relax.

Fast exercises are done in the same way as slow exercises but, when you squeeze the muscles, let go immediately so that you only feel a very quick lift in your pelvic floor.

You should repeat these exercises as many times as possible, up to 10 times.

If you are unable to feel a definite squeeze and lift, you should seek further advice from the service or your GP as there are other treatments that you may benefit from.

When should I do them?

Once you have mastered the technique, you can do them in any position, at all times of the day. You may find it easier to link it to a particular activity e.g washing your hands.

Aim to do both the fast and slow exercises at least three times a day. Your muscles will improve and strengthen with time and exercise.

You will need to do the exercises regularly, (ideally every day) for three months, before you will see any changes.

Once you have begun to see an improvement, the exercises need to be continued to see further results and to maintain the improvement that has been achieved so far.

Ideally, pelvic floor exercises should be a part of every woman's daily activity, whether they have an incontinence problem or not. This will help to keep the muscle strong and healthy.

