

## Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women

### What is the pelvic floor and what does it do?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles and connective tissue that attaches to the pubic bone at the front, the tailbone (coccyx) at the back and the “sit bones” at the sides. The pelvic floor surrounds the front passage (urethra), vagina and back passage (anus).

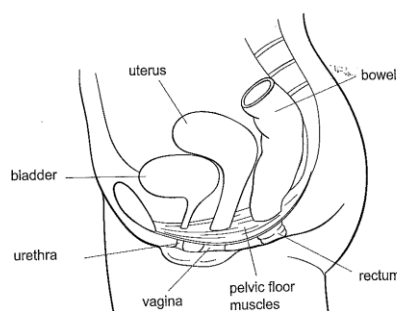
The pelvic floor:

- Supports the bladder, vagina and bowel
- Helps with bladder and bowel control
- Increases sexual sensation through increased tone

What are the signs of pelvic floor dysfunction?

- Urine loss when you cough, sneeze, lift or exercise
- Frequency – passing urine more than 8 times per day
- Urgency – a sudden, urgent need to pass urine
- Vaginal prolapse and / or dragging ache in the vagina
- Poor control of wind from the back passage or vagina
- Poor control of stool from the back passage
- Poor sensation with sexual intercourse

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Note: these symptoms can occur when there is pelvic floor weakness but some can also occur when your pelvic floor is over-active. Please see your physiotherapist before commencing pelvic floor exercises.

### Pelvic Floor Exercises

It has been shown that doing regular pelvic floor muscle exercises can help to improve your bladder and bowel control, reduce symptoms of prolapse and improve sexual function. It is important to have pelvic floor muscles that are strong but can also relax fully. The first step to having healthy pelvic floor muscles is practising the correct technique.

### Practice

1. Find a comfortable position. Relax your tummy, buttock and thigh muscles. Take easy slow breaths, allowing the belly to gently expand and then soften.
2. Draw in your pelvic floor muscles by imagining that you are:
  - Stopping the flow of urine.
  - You may also feel a closing and lifting sensation around the vagina and back passage.
3. Relax and let the muscles go. Allow the pelvic floor muscles to fully relax between each contraction.
4. Try this again. Don't tighten any other muscles in your body except your pelvic floor muscles. You may notice a gentle drawing in of your lower tummy muscles – this is OK.
5. Check in with your breathing – it should continue to be relaxed and regular.

### Self-Checks

- Flow stop:
  - On a full bladder, start urinating. After 3-4 seconds, try to stop the flow of urine mid-stream. Try to hold for a few seconds then relax and fully empty your bladder.
- Feel:
  - Either lying in bed or with your foot up on a stool, insert one finger or your thumb gently into the vagina. Try to contract your pelvic floor muscles and feel for a closing and lifting sensation around your finger.

- See:
  - Either lying in bed or in standing with your foot up on a stool or toilet.
  - Part the lips of your vulva gently with your fingers and with your other hand, use a handheld mirror to look at your vagina.
  - Try a pelvic floor contraction. You should see a 'wink' and some drawing up of the vagina.

## Pelvic Floor Muscle Training Program

### **Longer holds**

Gently turn on your pelvic floor muscles.  
Hold for 5 seconds and relax for 5 seconds.  
Repeat 10 times.

### **Quick squeezes**

Perform a quick but strong contraction.  
Follow with complete relaxation.  
Aim for 10 repeats in 10 seconds.

- ➔ Perform in lying, sitting or standing
- ➔ Complete 3 full sets of longer holds and quick squeezes per day.

Practice contracting your pelvic floor before:

- Coughing and sneezing
- Lifting, bending or changing position
- Any activity in which you leak

## Reminders

If you are having difficulty remembering to do your exercises, try to set alarms/reminders on your phone or write reminders and leave around your house. There are also Apps that you might wish to download on your phone to help keep you on track.

## Good Bladder habits

- Aim for 6-8 glasses of fluid per day. Try to space this out across the day to avoid unnecessary rushing to the toilet and going frequently.
- Avoid "just in case" visits to the toilet.

## Other Tips for Pelvic Floor Health

- Maintain a healthy weight and active lifestyle.
- Avoid constipation and straining on the toilet.

Developed by the Queensland Women's Men's & Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Network.

References Supplied on Request.