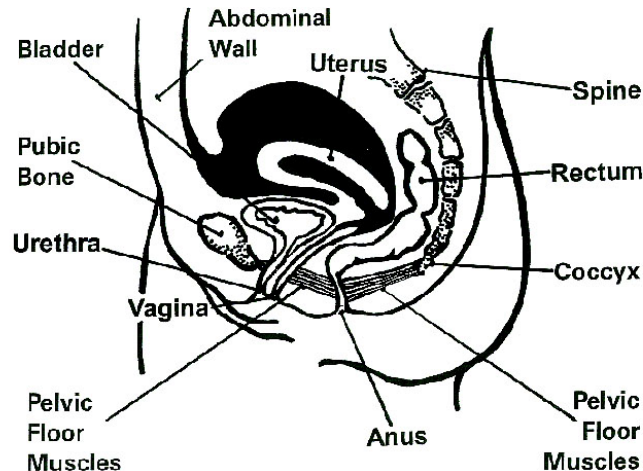


THE FEMALE PELVIC FLOOR

The pelvic floor consists of several layers of muscles that cover the bottom of the pelvic cavity. These muscles have several distinct roles:

1. To support the pelvic organs, the bladder, uterus and colon within the pelvis.
2. To assist in stopping and starting the flow of urine or the passage of gas or stool.
3. To aid in sexual appreciation.



HOW TO LOCATE THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

The Urine Stop Test

- At the midstream of your urine flow, squeeze the pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the sensation of the openings shut and the muscles pulling up and into the pelvic cavity. If you have strong muscles you will slow or stop the stream of urine.
- Try to stop or slow the flow of urine without tensing the muscles of your legs, buttocks or abdominal wall.
- Do this only to locate the muscles, not as a daily exercise.

Feeling the Muscle

- You can insert 1 or 2 fingers into the vagina to feel the contraction and lifting of the muscles. You should feel the opening of the vagina tighten.
- Place a fingertip on the anal opening. Contract and lift the muscles as though you were holding back gas or a bowel movement. You will feel your anal opening tighten.

Watching the Muscle Contract

- Begin by lying on a flat surface. Position yourself with your knees apart and bent with your head elevated on several pillows. Use a mirror to look at the anal and vaginal openings and the perineal body (the area between the two openings).
- Contract or tighten the muscles around the openings and watch for a lifting of the perineal body and closure of the openings.
- If you see a bulge or feel tissues coming out of your openings, this is an incorrect contraction and you should notify your health care provider for more instructions.

