

Patient information

Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises for Women

Barts Health Physiotherapy Website:

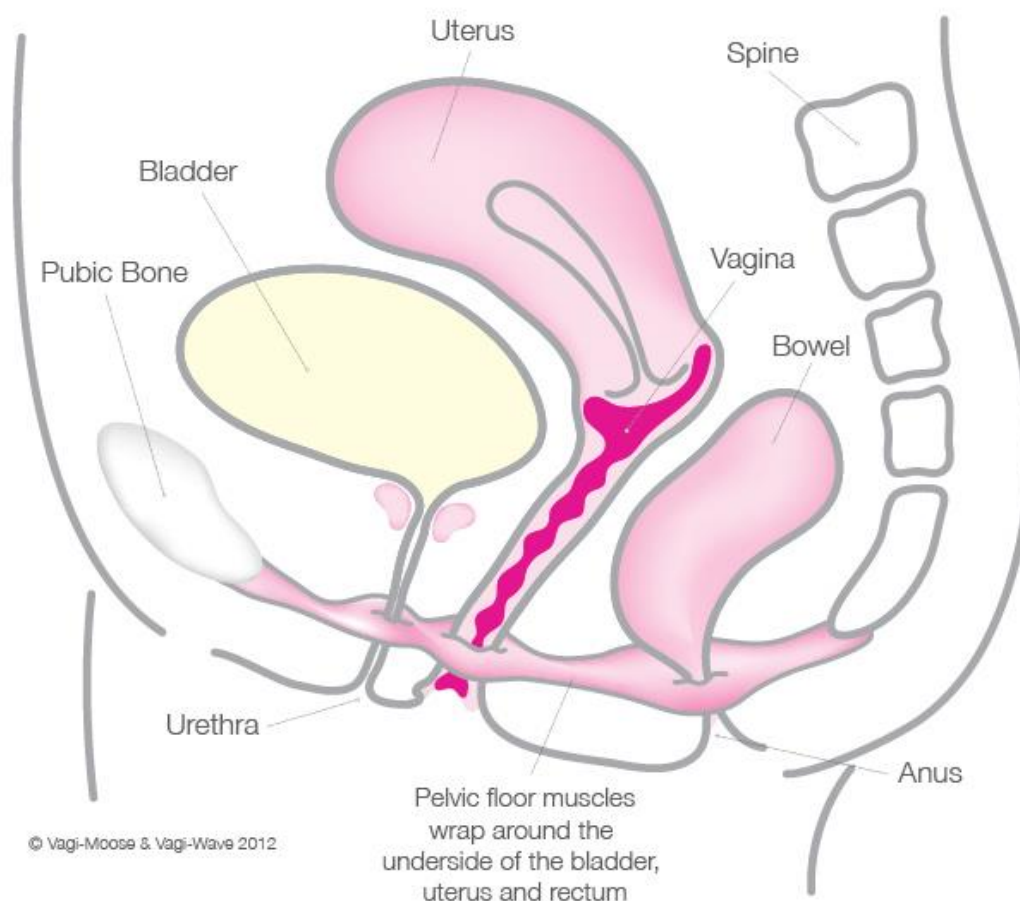
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Introduction

The Pelvic floor muscles lie across the base of the pelvis, like a sling from the pelvic bone at the front to the spine at the back and either sides of the sitting bones. The urethra (Front passage), the vagina (birth canal) and rectum (back passage) pass through the pelvic floor muscles. One third of all women experience a problem in the pelvic floor muscle during their life time.

Bladder, bowel and sexual functions require good pelvic floor muscles.



What do the pelvic floor muscles do?

- They keep the pelvic organs (Bladder, uterus & bowel) in the correct position.
- Help to stop the unwanted leakage of urine from the bladder or faeces from the bowel by keeping the bladder and bowel openings closed while also relaxing to allow easy bladder and bowel emptying.
- Help with sex by improving the vaginal sensation, reaching orgasm and your ability to grip.
- They are important in posture and with the help of the abdominal muscles support your spine.

What causes the pelvic floor muscles to weaken?

- Pregnancy and child birth (vaginal delivery and Caesarean)
- Lack of exercise
- Chronic constipation
- Heavy or repeated lifting
- High impact exercises
- Being over weight
- Smoking
- Natural aging / Menopause
- Neurological conditions and diabetics
- Surgery
- Persistent cough

What are the symptoms of pelvic floor weakness?

Bladder

- Stress Urinary Incontinence (leakage with coughing ,sneezing, laughing , running, jumping, and during sexual intercourse)
- Urgency and urge urinary incontinence (Sudden need to go to the toilet which may include leakage)
- Frequency (Going to the toilet too often)
- Nocturia (Getting up at night time to go to the toilet)

Bowel

- Bowel incontinence/leakage with activity or urgency
- Getting difficult to clean after bowel movement
- Flatus incontinence (unable to control wind)

Vagina

- Pelvic organ prolapse/feeling of heaviness or something coming down
- Pain in vagina or sometimes abdominal
- Lack of sensation or pain with sex.

Finding your pelvic floor muscles

- Position – Lying or Sitting comfortably with your knees slightly apart.
- Squeeze and draw your pelvic floor muscles upwards and forwards : *imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and urine at the same time.* You may feel a tightening and a lifting up as your muscles contract and you should feel your pelvic floor fully relax after every contraction.
- Ensure you are not:
 1. *Pulling in your tummy*
 2. *Tightening your buttocks*
 3. *Squeezing your legs together*
 4. *Holding your breath*

Way to check correct performance of your pelvic floor muscles

- Using a mirror, the area between your vagina and the back passage (perineum) should move up and inwards away from the mirror when you contract your pelvic floor muscles.
- Insert your finger inside your vagina and feel the muscles tightening around your thumb or finger.
- If you are sexually active, you could try to squeeze your muscles during sex. Ask if your partner can feel the squeeze.

How do I exercise the pelvic floor muscles?

Pelvic floor muscle exercises (sometimes called kegels) should include short quick squeezes and long slow squeezes. You should work the muscles until they tire, do the exercises regularly to help the muscles become stronger and more effective.

Long squeezes or slow exercise

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. See how long you can hold the squeeze for.
- Then fully release and let them fully relax.
- Then do the same again and see how many times you can repeat the squeezes.
- Aim to progress each squeeze hold for to 10 seconds and 10 repetitions.

Short squeezes or quick exercise

- Gently tighten your pelvic floor muscles and then immediately let them go again (relax). How many times can you do this quick squeeze before the muscles get tired?
- Aim to be able to do 10 short squeezes.

- You may need to start with ‘ little & often’ if you find that you can only hold the squeeze for a short time, or only do a few before the muscles tire.
- You should do your pelvic floor muscle exercises at least 3 times each day.
- You may find it easier to start your programme when you are sitting or lying.
- Build up your exercise routine gradually over the weeks & months.
- As your muscles improve, aim to do the exercises in other positions such as standing up and during your functional activities.
- You should notice an improvement in 3-5 months. When you do notice an improvement, keep practising your pelvic floor muscle exercises once a day to maintain the improvement.
- If you find that you have stress urinary incontinence, try low impact exercises such walking/pilates/swimming & avoid very high impact exercises such as running, sit up’s, heavy weights.

Tips for you

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before any activity which involves a rise in intra-abdominal pressure, i.e. sneezing, coughing, carrying, bending or lifting something heavy
- Only go to the toilet when bladder is full. Avoid going to the toilet just in case.
- If you are overweight, try and lose weight to ease strain the on your pelvic floor
- Prevent constipation and straining by ensuring your diet has enough fibre and that you drink at least 1.5 litres of water per day.

Helpful reminders

- Put a reminder on your phone or download NHS Squeezy App on a smart phone (£2-3) as a reminder to do the pelvic floor exercises.
- Try & do them as part of a daily routine, doing them at the same time as another activity, e.g. brushing teeth, eating a meal, during a regular journey (e.g. in the car, bus, train, tube etc).
- Some women also like to use gadgets to help them remember. There are many available to buy but they don't suit everyone. It is best to seek advice from a specialist physiotherapist about what might help if you are finding it difficult to do these exercises.
- If you experience difficulty with these exercises or pain in the pelvic floor muscles or abdomen after doing the exercises, you should seek advice from a physiotherapist experienced in treating women with pelvic floor problems.
- Ask to be referred by your GP to your local women's health physiotherapist.

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