

Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises for Women

Improving your bladder control



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SURGICAL SUPPLIES LTD

Moorland Surgical Supplies

68 Hyde Road, Denton, Manchester M34 3AG

Freephone: 0800 652 6667 Fax: 0161 337 8552

www.moorland.com info@moorland.com



About your pelvic floor muscles

The group of muscles known as the pelvic floor muscles are just inside the pelvis bone at the lower part of your body.

The muscles:

Support the bladder where urine is stored, the uterus (womb), and the bowel.
Assist normal bladder and bowel function, and prevent leakage (incontinence).
Contribute to sexual function.

The pelvic floor muscles are attached between the bone at the lower part of your tummy (pubic bone) to the base of the spine (coccyx).

There are three openings in the floor, one for the urethra which carries urine from the bladder, one for the vagina (birth canal) and one through which the bowel empties (anus).

How the pelvic floor muscles may be weakened

In women, the pelvic floor muscles may be weakened as a result of:

- Pregnancy
- Following childbirth
- Changes due to the menopause
- Constipation which is long-standing
- Chest problems with a chronic cough
- Being overweight
- Being generally unfit
- Some medical conditions
- Lifting heavy loads at work or home

Weak pelvic floor muscles can result in urine leakages.

How to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.

You need to learn and regularly carry out your pelvic floor muscle exercises.
To begin, choose a quiet time and place, so you can concentrate on learning the exercises correctly.

Sit, stand or lie down with your feet comfortably apart. You can do the exercises in any of these positions.

Relax and breathe normally.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises:

You are going to learn to carry out both slow and fast pelvic floor muscle exercises. Concentrate, then squeeze and lift the pelvic floor muscles as if you are trying to stop yourself from passing urine. Then tighten the muscles around the back passage, as if you are trying not to pass wind. By doing these two together you should be exercising your pelvic floor muscles.

Keeping the muscles tightly squeezed, count slowly and hold for as long as you feel comfortable. Then relax for the same count. Try to gradually increase the duration up to 10 seconds if possible. Aim to repeat the 10 second holds as many times as you can, aiming for 10 times.

To check you are using the correct muscles, hold a small mirror so you can see the area between your legs. Tighten the muscles. The skin between the anus and vagina should move away from the mirror.

After a short rest, repeat the above exercise but this time tighten and relax the muscles quickly as if to the beat of a drum; Tighten, Relax, Tighten, Relax. Make sure that you properly relax between each fast contraction and do as many as you can up to 10.

Improving your bladder control

There are other simple measures you can take to promote a healthy bladder and pelvic floor.

To prevent or reduce urine leakage, squeeze the pelvic muscles tightly at the same time as you do any activity that usually causes urine leakage. The procedure is called The Knack.

Reduce the intake of caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee, chocolate and fizzy drinks as these can increase bladder and bowel symptoms.

Avoid constipation and straining.

Avoid heavy lifting.

Maintain a fluid intake of 1 and a half litres a day.

If overweight, aim to reduce your weight to an acceptable weight for your height and build.

A chronic cough can weaken the pelvic floor muscles. Always seek advice from your doctor if you have a persistent cough.

Smoking can make a cough worse and tobacco smoking increases the risk of cancers, including bladder cancer. If you would like help in stopping smoking, see your Doctor or Practice Nurse for advice.

If you see any blood in your urine, you should contact your Doctor or Practice Nurse for advice.

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