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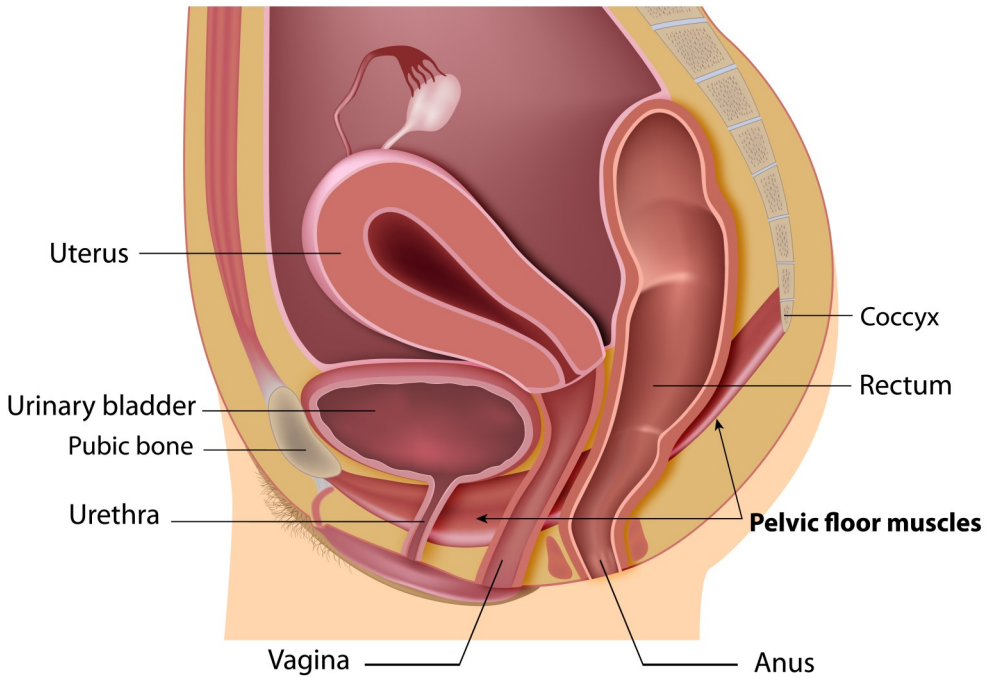
Women's Services Pelvic Floor Exercises



Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust: delivering excellence in musculo-skeletal services and pelvic health physiotherapy across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Introduction

The pelvic floor muscles form a hammock underneath your pelvis to provide support and control for your bladder and bowel. The muscles attach to your pubic bone at the front, then span backwards to your coccyx (tailbone) and outwards to your sitting bones. The opening of your bladder, vagina and your bowel all pass through the pelvic floor. The muscles also contribute to sexual satisfaction.



What does the pelvic floor do?

- It supports your pelvic organs and abdominal contents especially when standing or when there is an increase in pressure in your abdomen (intra-abdominal pressure) with activities such as lifting, bending and straining.
- It helps keep the bladder and bowel openings closed to prevent unwanted leakage. The muscles need to work gently most of the time and also be able to work harder when your intra-abdominal pressure increases i.e. when you cough, sneeze, lift or exert yourself.
- It is used to control wind and when 'holding on' with your bowels.
- It can help improve sensation during sexual intercourse.

Why should I exercise my pelvic floor muscles?

All women need to do pelvic floor exercises and up to a third of all women experience a problem with their pelvic floor muscles at some time in their life. Your pelvic floor muscles need to be strong but they also need to work in the right way at the right time. Symptoms you may be experiencing could include:

- Urinary leaking with activities such as coughing, laughing, sneezing, lifting and jumping
- A sudden need to rush to the toilet or leaking on the way to the toilet
- A need to go to the toilet too frequently in the day and/or the night
- Leakage of faeces or difficulty controlling wind
- A feeling of heaviness, dragging or something 'coming down' inside your vagina
- A reduced or lack of sensation during intercourse.

How to do pelvic floor exercises

A pelvic floor contraction is performed by closing and drawing up your front and back passages. Imagine you are trying to stop wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine. It should be a sensation of 'tighten and lift'.

You should:

- Continue to breath normally,
- Keep your buttocks and legs relaxed though you may feel a gentle tightening of your tummy,
- Always let the muscles fully relax at the end of a contraction.

You need to practice long contractions as well as short ones.

Long contractions

Contract your pelvic floor muscles and maintain the contraction whilst you continue to breathe in and out normally. Hold for a maximum of 10 seconds or 3 breaths in and out. Allow the muscles to fully relax before repeating up to a maximum of 10 times.

Starting point - hold for seconds/breaths

Relax

Repeat times

Short contractions

Contract your pelvic floor muscles quickly then immediately relax them. Allow them to fully relax before repeating this up to a maximum of 10 times.

Starting point repeats

- Aim to do these exercises 3 times a day but start with a small amount and build up gradually as you feel able.
- The exercises should not make you feel uncomfortable or cause you to leak.
- Aim for quality rather than quantity
- Gradually build up your hold times and repeat times as the exercises become easier until you reach the maximums stated.
- You may find it easier to do your exercises lying or sitting to start with. Sitting leaning forwards can be helpful to start with. Do try the exercises in a standing position as soon as you feel able to do so - initially you could try leaning forwards onto a worktop/ table top or leaning back against a wall. When standing, turning your toes inwards or your heels inwards can help activate the front and back portion of your pelvic floor muscles respectively (see pictures on the next page).
- It can take 2-3 weeks to improve the brain-muscle connections allowing better coordination of your pelvic floor muscles.
- It can take about 4 to 6 months to improve the strength of your pelvic floor muscles. You will need to always do some amount of the exercises to maintain their improvement.



Sitting leaning forwards

Standing leaning forwards



Leaning back against a wall



Standing turning toes inwards



Standing turning heels inwards



Remembering to do the exercises!

It is very easy to forget to do your pelvic floor exercises. Some tricks to trigger your memory are:

- Put a reminder on your phone
- Try one of the pelvic floor exerciser apps that are available
- Do them after emptying your bladder whilst still sitting on the toilet or standing by it
- Use coloured stickers or reminder notes around the house/place of work
- Use the advert break between television programmes

Other ways to help

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles prior and during any activity that increased the intra-abdominal pressure i.e. coughing, sneezing, lifting, carrying and bending .
- Check you can breathe easily throughout your activity or exercise and that you are not holding your breath. This could include times when you are lifting something or when getting out of a chair.
- If your symptoms feel worse with certain activities or exercise, consider lower impact activities and shorter bursts of activity whilst you improve your pelvic floor function.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.
- Avoid constipation - eat adequate fibre (15-30g per day) and drink adequate fluids (1.5-2 litres per day though more in hot weather, after exercise, during air travel and when you are ill). Many people find symptoms can be worse when they are constipated as additional pressure is placed on the pelvic floor.

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