

Relaxing your pelvic floor muscles

Pelvic Floor Conservative
Colorectal management
Information for Patients

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This leaflet looks at ways to relax your pelvic floor muscles when they are tight or working too hard.

The pelvic floor is a web of muscles that act as a sling. They support your bladder and bowel (and womb in a female). It helps you control your bladder and bowel. It also plays a role when you have sex.

It is very important to be able to fully relax your pelvic floor muscles as well as being able to contract or tighten them. A tight pelvic floor does not always mean the muscles are strong. They can be tight but weak. If the muscles are already stiff and tense, it can be very difficult to tighten them further to build muscle strength. Muscles work well if they are allowed a break. This allows important blood flow to send oxygen and nutrition to the muscles.

Pelvic floor muscles that struggle to “let go” can cause pain and spasm, bladder and bowel problems.

What problems can having a tight pelvic floor cause?

- Constipation and pain when passing a poo or having a feeling of incomplete emptying of bowels.
- Bowel accidents
- Bladder or pelvic pain.
- Bladder urgency and accidents.
- Problems emptying the bladder.
- Pain or discomfort on sexual intercourse.
- Difficulty and/ or pain with vaginal/ rectal examinations or difficulty inserting tampons.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

- Difficulty getting and keeping erections
- Difficulty/ pain doing pelvic floor strengthening exercises

If you are stressed and anxious this can make the pelvic floor muscle tense and symptoms worse. It is likely that if you have held tension in your pelvic floor muscles for any period of time that your brain will have learnt that this is 'normal' for you. The first important step is to become aware of this and let your brain recognise it and allow change.

How can I teach them to relax?

Belly breathing

Using the diaphragm well, our main breathing muscle, can help to relax the pelvic floor.

1. Place a hand on your upper tummy, just above the belly button. Feel this area rise and fall as you breathe in and out. Do not force the breath. Imagine a balloon gently inflating here as you breathe in. Try to keep your chest still if possible. You may feel your lower ribs expand outwards slightly.
2. Now try to slow the breath down. Breathe slowly in for 4 seconds, then out for 4 seconds. Increase this to 8 seconds with practice.
3. Now place your hand on your lower tummy (just above the pubic bone) and repeat the exercise, aiming to feel the rise and fall here. Again, do not force the breath in or out.
4. Watch these videos to help you:
 - A) Michelle Kenway pelvic floor relaxation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Auca88tmUu8>
 - B) Jilly Bond belly breathing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU4Retger3k>
 - C) The Flower Empowered: Understanding the connection between breathing and your pelvic floor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8uMiz1Zx1r0>

Pelvic floor imagery

1. After belly breathing (see above) imagine the pelvic floor as a bowl, filling up the bottom of the pelvis. Imagine the balloon moving down through the pelvis to rest on the bowl.
2. Focus on the seat bones (the bony bits in your bottom that you sit on). Imagine that they are connected by elastic. Try to draw them very slightly together, then focus on them widening and moving away from each other.
3. Focus on the tail bone or coccyx. Imagine it as a tail, firstly drawing slightly between your legs, then going in the opposite direction and dropping down and backwards.
4. Women: imagine the lips around the vagina as a flower. Imagine the flower closing slightly first, then focus on the flower opening out.
5. Men: focus on the position of the scrotum or "balls". Draw them up slightly first (as if walking into cold water!), then focus on them dropping down.

These techniques are not always easy, so do not worry if you need more help with them! Your

therapist can guide you on techniques that work well. Sometimes equipment can be used to help you feel or see the muscles working and relaxing such as biofeedback.

Stretches

If the lower back and hips are stiff and tight then the pelvic floor muscles will often be too! There are many stretches that can help to get things moving on the outside and inside. These should not be painful or worsen symptoms. Please stop them if you have any concerns and discuss other options with your therapist. Here are a few examples with links to videos to help:

Happy baby pose:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ppku7i3ypGM> (Ventuno yoga)

You may find this easier holding your ankles rather than toes.

Cat-cow yoga pose: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y39PrKY_4JM (Yoga with Adriene)

Childs pose: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqVMAPM00DM> (Yoga with Adriene)

General relaxation

There are a few methods you could try to reduce stress and whole body tension.

Meditation

This can be used to create a sense of calm, peace and balance. It includes breathing techniques and can help with self-awareness. This may help with relaxation, sleep and cope with stress and pain.

The Headspace App is one example of links to guide you with meditation: www.headspace.com

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a type of meditation. You focus on being very aware of what you are sensing and feeling in the moment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

You may find these links helpful:

<https://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/>

The “Mitchell method of relaxation”

Also known as “simple relaxation”. It uses breathing and a sequence of gentle tension followed by relaxation throughout the body.

https://thepogp.co.uk/_userfiles/pages/files/resources/21xxxxpogpmitcheil_signed_off.pdf

Qigong and Tai Chi

These mind-body techniques may help to lower stress and anxiety, increase focus, and improved balance and flexibility. Most forms of qigong can be used by all ages and abilities but if it causes you any pain or concerns then stop the exercises.

Here are some examples to guide you.

Seated qigong link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKj8SXS-bfk>

Standing qigong link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwlvTcWR3Gs>

Yoga

Yoga can help you to cope with stress and improve wellbeing as well as helping develop flexibility, strength, balance and co-ordination. See the above videos in "stretches" as a few examples.

Contact details

Pelvic Floor Colorectal Conservative Management Clinic

0116 2583775. Messages can be left and will be picked up in working hours.

For any urgent advice please speak to your GP or call 111.

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Previous reference:

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