

Exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles for women

Physiotherapy Department

Information for Patients

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What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles in the pelvis. They are quite literally the floor on which everything rests.

They run from your pubic bone at the front to your tailbone at the back and in between your sitting bones.

Many women have symptoms of pelvic floor (PF) weakness. It is very common but is not something that should be accepted as 'normal'. Many women do find that their symptoms improve with the right help.

What are the symptoms of a weak pelvic floor?

Symptoms of pelvic floor weakness include:

- leakage of pee (urine), for example, when coughing, laughing, sneezing, running or jumping.
- needing to go to the toilet quickly and often (urgency and frequency).
- vaginal or pelvic heaviness/ discomfort.
- reduced feeling (sensitivity) during sex

This leaflet has exercises that can strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, These help reduce any leakage of pee during your normal activities.

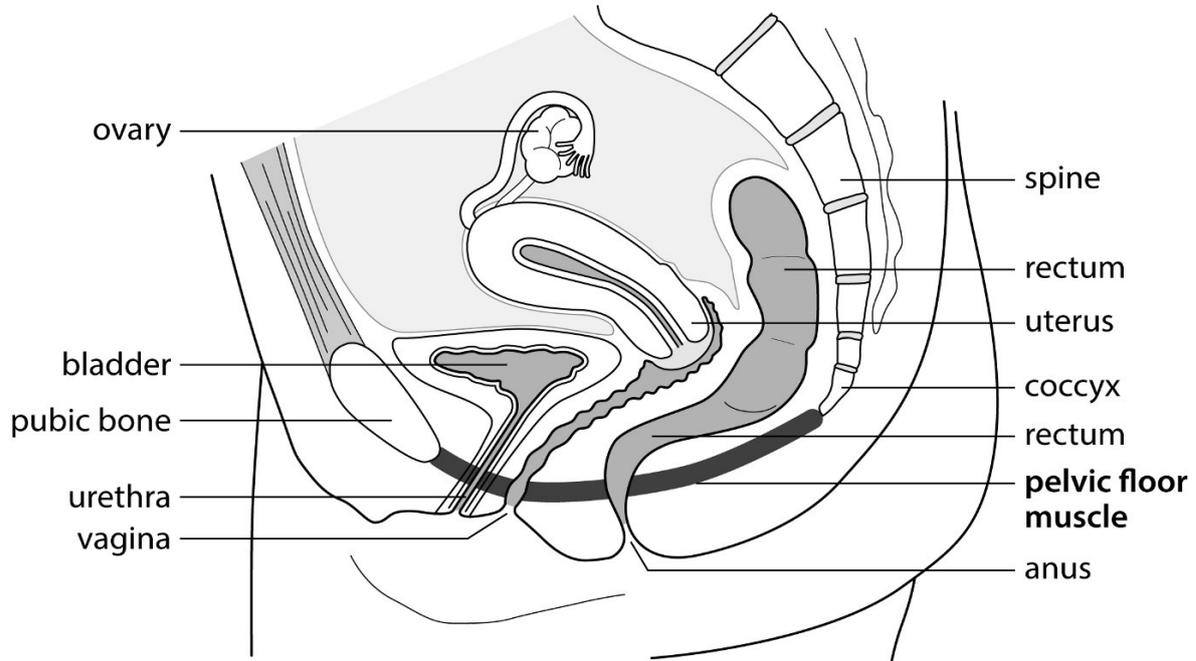
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Female pelvic floor

The Pelvic Floor

Lateral (side) view



What do the pelvic floor muscles do?

- Supports the bladder, womb (uterus) and the bowel.
- Closes the tube which runs from your bladder (urethra) to stop pee leaking out by accident.
- Stops pee and poo leaking when coughing, sneezing, running or lifting heavy objects.
- Helps stabilise the bones of the pelvis.
- Your pelvic floor muscles should be able to relax to help you empty your bladder and bowel.
- Greater sexual satisfaction for you and your partner.

What can make the pelvic floor muscles weak?

The pelvic floor muscles can become weak for many reasons. Some of the most common are:

- Getting older and particularly in menopause.
- Pregnancy/ childbirth.
- From long-term coughing.
- Constipation that lasts a long time or happens often.
- Long periods of inactivity due to illness.
- Pelvic and abdominal surgery.
- Being overweight.

What can I do to strengthen these muscles?

Regular pelvic floor exercise is the best way to get a strong pelvic floor. In most cases this is enough to reduce or resolve some symptoms.

If you are exercising effectively and **regularly** you should start to notice some change at around 8 weeks. It will take 4 to 6 months to get the full benefit.

Pelvic floor exercises

To help you find the correct muscles:

Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of pee. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing up the back and front passages.

It is important not to cheat. Do not tighten your tummy or buttocks, squeeze your legs together or hold your breath.

Remember to always breathe out, or breathe normally as you squeeze your pelvic floor.

You should practice these exercises **4** times every day. To get the best results do both the exercises below.

Long holds:

This exercise will help if

- 1 or more of your organs in the pelvis have slipped down from their normal position (prolapse),
- you struggle to get to the toilet on time for your bladder or bowels:
 - Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles as tightly as you can, for as long as you can for up to 10 seconds.
 - Completely release and rest for at least 4 seconds.
 - If you do not feel the muscles release, rest for a little longer to make sure you are fully relaxed or hold for less time and build up to 10 seconds.
 - Repeat up to 10 times in a row or until your muscles are tired.

Short squeezes:

This exercise will help if you have leak pee with coughing, sneezing, running, jumping or lifting.

- Do 10 short, quick squeezes, fully relaxing between each one.

Do not try these exercises while passing pee. This may lead to urine infections or urinary retention.

Tips to get the most out of your exercises

- No one can see when you are doing these exercises. You can easily fit them into your daily life.
- Give the exercises your full attention so that you are working them as hard as you can.
- You can exercise in any position. Start exercising lying down, or on your side, if the muscles are weak. Try doing the exercises in sitting or standing up as you get stronger.
- Space the exercises out so you are doing them regularly throughout the day. Use prompts to remind you such as after meal times or after going to the toilet.
- Breathe normally whilst doing your exercises.

Tips to help manage your pelvic floor symptoms

- Squeeze the pelvic floor just before you cough, laugh or lift anything heavy. This can reduce the amount of pee leakage. It can also help make the pelvic floor muscles stronger at the same time.
- The pelvic floor muscle tightens better when your back is straight. Try not to bend from your back when you cough. Try to bend from the hips when you need to cough.
- Avoid high impact exercises. These can make your symptoms worse, such as running and jumping.
- Keep on with low impact exercises such as walking, cycling and swimming.
- Avoid going to the toilet 'just in case'.
- Avoid constipation and straining on the toilet.
- Drink plenty of fluids, aim for 1.5 to 2 litres a day
- Avoid drinks like caffeinated coffee and caffeinated tea, fizzy pop, and citrus drinks
- Stop smoking and vaping
- Keep (or maintain) a healthy weight

When can I stop doing the exercises?

You should keep doing these exercises every day - for life.

If you stop exercising you will lose some of the strength. You may notice your symptoms getting worse again. You may notice this in as little as 1 week.

After 4 to 6 months of doing these exercises you should see your symptoms get better. You then need to do 1 set of pelvic floor exercises in a challenging position at least once a day.



Can I be referred to a physiotherapist?

If your symptoms are getting worse, or if you are not sure if you are doing the exercises correctly, please ask your GP to refer you to a physiotherapist in the Pelvic Health Service.

Your physiotherapist will assess your pelvic floor strength and stamina. They will advise you on an exercise programme to follow. They will tell you how many times a day to do the exercises. You can do these from various positions, including when standing and walking.

There are other treatments available that can be used with pelvic floor exercises to help you get the results you want.

There are apps which can be used to help with pelvic floor exercises. Your physiotherapist can advise you about these.

Contact details

Physiotherapy Department - Leicester General Hospital: 0116 258 4070

Reference:

[Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises \(for women\) | POGP](#)

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