

## **Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women**

### **Why do Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises?**

Doing pelvic floor muscle exercises can help to reduce and even eliminate leakage of urine and/or stool. These exercises can reduce the need to rush to the toilet to pass urine and/or stool (urgency) and they can also help when the bladder, womb or bowel drop (prolapse).

The pelvic floor muscles have several functions, which are to:-

- Provide bladder, womb and bowel support
- Prevent leakage of urine/ stool but also allows easy passage of urine/ stool
- Support the lower back and pelvis
- Facilitate enjoyment during sex

The pelvic floor muscles can become a problem due to:

- Pregnancy
- Child birth
- Ageing
- Menopause
- Being over weight
- Constipation and straining
- Repetitive heavy lifting
- Chronic coughing
- Pelvic/ abdominal surgery
- Back pain

Your physiotherapist will advise you of the best way for you to exercise your pelvic floor muscles. The pelvic floor muscles can also be exercised in a way to help them to relax if they are too tight. Tightness of the pelvic floor muscles may cause problems with passing urine and/or stool and pain during sex (see a separate leaflet for details).

### **What are the Pelvic Floor Muscles?**

The pelvic floor muscles are layers of muscle that cover the bottom of the pelvis. They attach from the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis, around the side of the pelvic bones to the tail bone at the back of the pelvis. They also wrap around the urethra (urine tube) and anus (back passage) and pass under the bladder, the womb and the bowel.

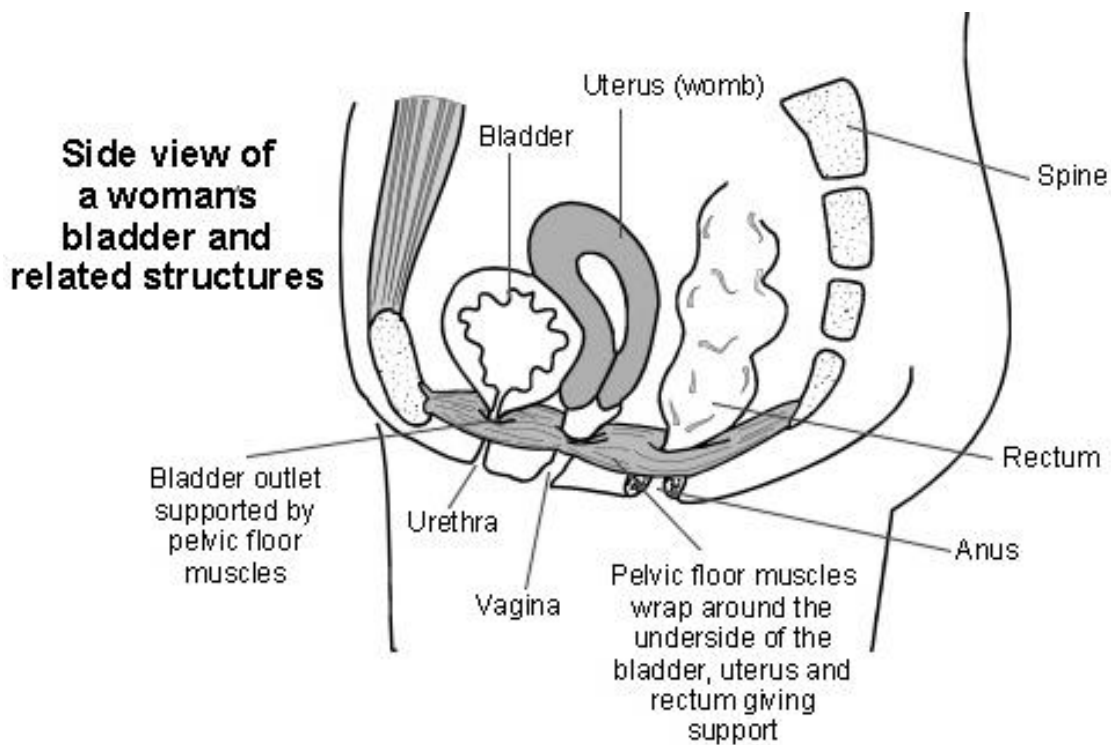


Diagram taken from [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

### How to do Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises.

It is important that you are exercising your pelvic floor muscles correctly to gain the most benefit from them. Firstly sit or lie in a comfortable position. If you are sitting, sit upright with your shoulders relaxed. Now think about where your back passage is and try squeezing it together and upwards as if you are going to stop wind escaping. Now at the same time think about where your vagina is and try to squeeze the muscle here together and upwards too.

Once you think that you can squeeze your pelvic floor muscles in the right way try **squeezing as tightly as you can** and release.

Repeat this .....times per day.

Now try squeezing your pelvic floor muscles together and upwards more gently, with **half of your maximum effort**, and hold for.....seconds. Relax for .....seconds. Repeat.....

Make sure that you are not squeezing your buttocks or legs when you are squeezing your pelvic floor muscles.

Do your pelvic floor muscle exercises .....times per day.

You should exercise your muscles in .....position.

## **How to get the most out of your exercises.**

- Try to find a regular time in your day to carry out your exercises. This will help you to remember to do them.
- As your muscles become stronger try exercising them in different positions.
- Also do your pelvic floor muscle exercises whilst carrying out activities that produce your symptoms i.e. squeeze your muscles before lifting an object or before coughing or sneezing can help to stop urine from leaking.
- If you need to rush to the toilet to empty your bladder, try to sit or stand still and squeeze your pelvic floor muscles for 10 seconds. This can help you to hold your urine for longer. Ideally you should be able to go 3-4 hours between passing urine.

## **Other points to consider.**

- It can take at least 8 weeks for muscles to strengthen and even then it may take a few months for your symptoms to improve as much as you would like. Don't give up, daily pelvic floor muscle exercises are the key to improving them!
- Once your symptoms have improved it is a good idea to continue exercising your pelvic floor muscles five times a week to maintain their fitness.

## **For further information**

If you have any further questions or concerns don't hesitate to ask your physiotherapist. You may also find the websites below helpful.

[www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org.uk](http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org.uk)

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Incontinence-urinary/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<http://www.csp.org.uk/publications/physiotherapy-works-urinary-incontinence>