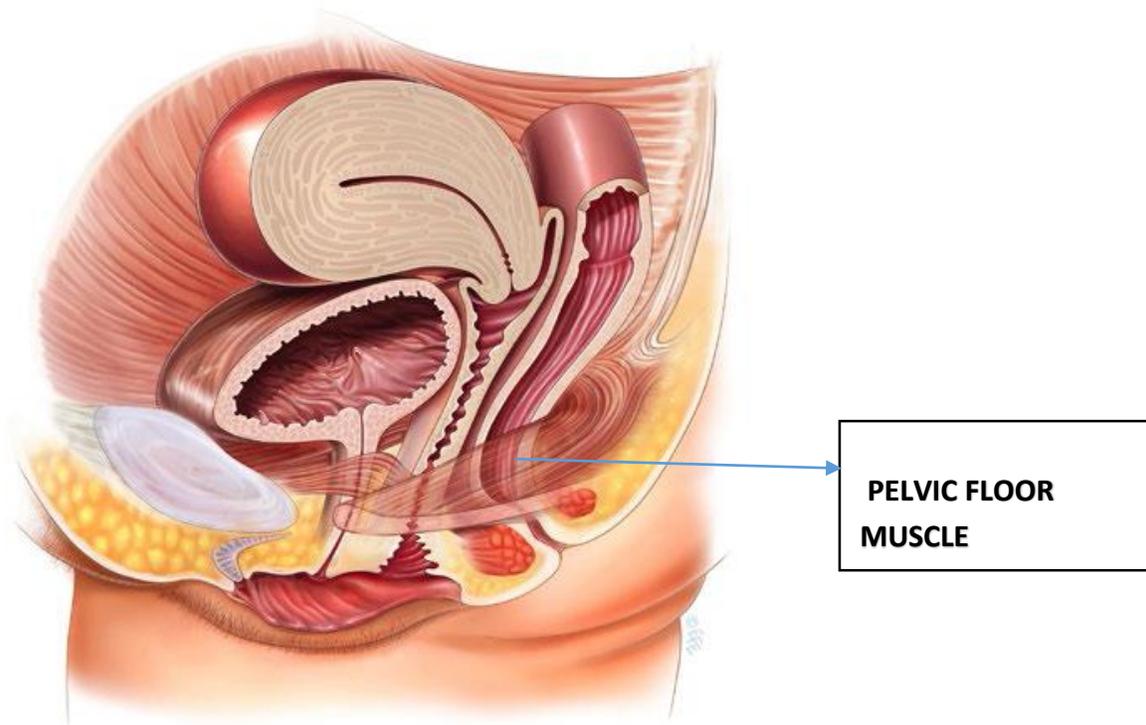


PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

1. What is the pelvic floor? What do the pelvic floor muscles do?
2. What if my pelvic floor muscles are weak?
3. What causes pelvic floor muscle weakness?
4. How to exercise your pelvic floor muscles?
5. How quickly will I see the results?

What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is composed of a thin sheet of muscle fibers and associated connective tissue which spans the area underneath the pelvis between the pubic bone at the front and the sacrum or tail bone at the back. These muscles support the urinary system, uterus (womb) and vagina and back passage. The pelvic floor muscles contract when you cough, sneeze or strain, helping to prevent the involuntary leakage of urine. They help to support the pelvic organs, like the bladder, uterus in the correct position. They help in the control of passing of urine, gas and bowel motions.



In order for the pelvic floor muscles to carry out their function well, they need to be fit and adequately toned just like any other muscle in the body.

What if my pelvic floor muscles are weak?

A weakness of the pelvic floor muscles may cause or worsen a number of problems including:

1. Stress urinary incontinence. The complaint of involuntary loss of urine on effort or physical exertion, including sporting activities etc, or on sneezing or coughing.
2. Urge urinary incontinence. The complaint of involuntary loss of urine associated with a sudden urgent need to pass urine (inability to hold on).
3. Mixed urgency and stress incontinence. The complaint of involuntary loss of urine associated with urgency and also with effort or physical exertion, or on sneezing or coughing.
4. Pelvic Organ Prolapse. Leading to a bulging of the bladder or bowel, or uterus (womb) into the vagina or out of the vaginal entrance if more severe.
5. A feeling of vaginal looseness.

What causes pelvic floor muscle weakness?

1. Under use. Like all muscles, the pelvic floor muscles need exercise to work well. Regular and adequate intensive exercise of the pelvic floor muscles should be maintained all through life (not just after having children) and is therefore very important.
2. Damage to the muscles during pregnancy and childbirth.
3. The change in hormones associated with menopause might play a role in weakening the muscles
4. Decreased muscle tone with aging.
5. Damage to the muscles through long term straining when constipated or associated with a chronic cough or obesity.

The role of pelvic floor exercises?

Intensive and regular pelvic floor exercises help by both strengthening and relaxing the pelvic floor muscles so they become firm and supportive, but not overactive. Many women will have a major improvement in or recovery from symptoms of stress urinary incontinence by learning effective pelvic floor exercises, thus avoiding or delaying the need for surgery.

How to exercise your pelvic floor muscles?

It is important to learn to do the exercises in the right way, and to check from time to time that you are still doing them correctly.

1. Sit comfortably with your feet and knees wide apart. Lean forward and place your elbows on your knees. Remember to keep breathing throughout and keep your stomach, leg and buttock muscles relaxed.
2. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing gas from the bowel and at the same time trying to stop the flow of urine from the bladder. You should feel a lifting and tightening around the vagina and anus.
3. Observing the muscles can be an effective way of checking they are working correctly. Lie propped on the bed; place a small mirror between your legs with your knees bent and apart. As you pull up the pelvic floor you should see your anus and entrance to the vagina lifting and drawing in.

N.B. If you notice the entrance to the vagina widening, you are pushing down and not pulling up, which is the opposite to tightening the pelvic floor muscle. Also, if you leak urine or pass gas when doing the exercises it is likely you are pushing down not pulling up.

'tighten, hold and release' as many times as you can (up to a max. of 8-12 repetitions)

4. Now perform the pelvic floor exercise, but squeeze and lift more firmly, then let go. This is called a quick contraction and will help your muscles react quickly when you laugh, cough, exercise or lift.

'tighten and release' as many times as you can (up to Maximum of 8-12 repetitions)

5. Do these 3 times a day.

How quickly will I see results?

You may not feel your bladder control improve until after 3 to 6 weeks, but it may take up to 6 months to have improvement. DON'T GIVE UP!!

It is important to maintain the strength of the muscles once you have completed an exercise programme. Practicing your exercises twice a week, 3 sets of 8-12 maximal contractions 3 times a day should be sufficient. Try to incorporate these exercises into daily life activities.

Points to remember

1. Weak pelvic muscles often cause bladder control problems.
2. Daily intensive exercises can strengthen pelvic muscles and improve bladder control.
3. Ask your therapist whether you are squeezing the right muscles.
4. Always tighten and contract your pelvic muscles before coughing, sneezing, jumping or lifting. This can help prevent involuntary loss of urine, gas or stool or bulging down of your pelvic organs.
5. Try to maintain your weight within healthy limits.