

PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES - a patient's guide

New Zealand Society of Physiotherapists

Pelvic floor exercises - it's a lifetime's practice

It is vital for a woman to keep her pelvic floor muscles strong - at all stages of her life.

From childhood, through menopause and into your later years, you can prevent problems resulting from the weakness of your pelvic floor muscles. Begin today!

Symptoms of weak pelvic floor muscles:

Do you have a loss of urine (incontinence)?

- This may occur when coughing, sneezing or laughing, or during vigorous activity (i.e. jogging, trampolining, or aerobics) or when rising from sitting and walking towards the toilet.
- Difficulty keeping a tampon in place
- Wind from the vagina or anus
- A prolapse of the vagina

If you have these symptoms begin exercising your pelvic floor muscles today.

Your pelvic floor muscles:

Discover where they are. Your pelvic floor muscles form the muscular base of your pelvis, running from the back to the front, and in from the sides, like a hammock.

Normal pelvic floor muscles

These muscles support the bladder, uterus and bowel, and control the outlets of these organs - the urethra (front passage), the vagina (birth canal), and the anus (back passage).

Weak pelvic floor muscles

When they weaken the support of your pelvic organs is lost, and this can lead to poor control of your bladder and bowel.

Pelvic floor exercises

Here is a set of exercises to improve the tone of your pelvic floor muscles:

- Make sure that you are relaxed and in a comfortable position.
- Continue to breathe normally.
- HOLD your muscles tight for three normal breaths out, and then let them go slowly.

Use the suggested following tests to check you are doing the exercises correctly:

1. Tighten and pull-up the muscles around your urethra (front passage), and HOLD. Test you are doing this correctly by trying to stop a flow of urine mid-stream. Note: Do this test once a day only, always at the same time of day. After testing, take time to relax and allow your bladder to finish emptying.

2. Tighten and pull-up the muscles within your vagina (birth passage), and HOLD. Test you are doing this correctly by placing 1-2 fingers inside your vagina. Squeeze your muscles tightly around them.
3. Tighten and pull-up the muscles round your anus (back passage), as though preventing the passing of wind, and HOLD.
4. Tighten and pull-up the muscles around all three passages, and HOLD.

When, where and how often?

It is best to do these exercises "little and often" as these muscles tire quickly.

Find 20 opportunities every day to perform the exercises.

At each exercise session, perform ONE of each of the four exercises. Repeat this exercise five times in a session.

You can do your exercises anywhere, any time and in any position.

To prevent embarrassing moments:

Always tighten and lift your pelvic floor muscles during the following activities:

- Coughing
- Laughing
- Exercising
- Sneezing
- Nose blowing
- Lifting
- Pushing
- Changing position

Benefits

- Enjoy sport without the embarrassment of wet pants.
- Enjoy intercourse after childbirth and menopause.
- Don't accept your incontinence (even if it's only a few drops) as being part of motherhood and womanhood.

Success will not happen overnight - it takes time to restore your muscle tone, so start today, and make it "A LIFETIME'S PRACTICE".

Getting help

Consult with a physiotherapist specialising in this field if you are having difficulty with the exercises or if you are experiencing no change in your problems. Further investigations may be necessary through your family doctor.