

## Who can I contact for more help or information?

Best Health (prepared by the British Medical Association)  
NHS Clinical Knowledge Summaries (formerly known as Prodigy)  
NHS Direct  
Patient UK  
Royal College of Anaesthetists (for information about anaesthetics)  
Royal College of Surgeons (patient information section)

Whiston Hospital  
Warrington Road,  
Prescot, Merseyside, L35 5DR  
Telephone: 0151 426 1600



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[www.sthk.nhs.uk](http://www.sthk.nhs.uk)

# Pelvic Floor Exercises in Women

This leaflet can be made available  
in alternative languages / formats on request.

如有需要，本传单可提供其他语言/版式  
此單張的其他語言/格式版本可按要求提供

Na żądanie ta ulotka może zostać udostępniona  
w innych językach/formatkach.

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## What is the evidence base for this information?

What is the pelvic floor and why does it become weak?

The pelvic floor is a complex layer of muscles and ligaments which stretches like a hammock from the pubic bone (at the front) to the tail end of the backbone (the coccyx).

### The pelvic floor has several functions:

- It supports your pelvic and abdominal organs, especially when you are standing or straining;
- It helps the opening of the bladder to stay closed when you cough, sneeze or strain;
- It is used to control leakage of wind or motions from your lower bowel;
- It helps to increase sexual awareness by tightening during intercourse.

The pelvic floor can become weak because of childbirth, prolonged straining to empty your bowels, lack of exercise and the menopause. It may, of course, simply deteriorate as a result of ageing. A weak pelvic floor gives you less control so that you leak urine when you exercise, cough, lift or sneeze.

### How can exercising the pelvic floor muscles help?

Exercising the pelvic floor muscles can strengthen them so that they provide the support you need. This will improve your bladder control and improve (or even stop) leakage of urine. Like any other muscles in the body, the more you use and exercise them, the stronger they become.

## Are there any other important points?

This publication provides input from specialists, the British Association of Urological Surgeons, the Department of Health and evidence-based sources as a supplement to any advice you may already have been given by your GP.

Alternative treatments can be discussed in more detail with your urologist or Specialist Nurse.

### Who can I contact if I have a problem when I get home?

If you experience any problems related to your surgery or admission once you have been discharged home.

Please feel free to contact 4A, 4B or 4C ward for advice from the nurse in charge. They will assist you via the telephone, advise you return to your GP or ask you to make your way to the ED department at Whiston Hospital depending upon the nature of your concern.

4A Ward – 0151 430 1420

4B Ward – 0151 430 1637

4C Ward – 0151 430 1643

## Are there any other important points?

This booklet includes advice from specialists, the British Association of Urological Surgeons, the Department of Health and other sources.

You should read this booklet with any advice your GP or other healthcare professional may already have given you.

Alternative treatments can be discussed in more detail with your urologist or specialist nurse.

## Disclaimer

While we have made every effort to be sure the information in this booklet is accurate, we cannot guarantee there are no errors or omissions.

We cannot accept responsibility for any loss resulting from something that anyone has, or has not, done as a result of the information in this booklet.

## Students

There may be students present during your consultation as part of their on-going training.

Please let the staff know if you wish to be seen by a doctor only.

## How do I find the pelvic floor muscles?

It is not easy to identify your pelvic floor muscles. Exercising them should not show at all 'on the outside'.

Here is what to do:

- Sit comfortably with your knees slightly apart. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind from the bowel. To do this, you must squeeze the muscle around the back passage. Try lifting and squeezing the muscle as if you have wind. You should be able to feel the muscle move and your buttocks or legs should not move at all. You should notice that the skin around your back passage tightens up and creates the sensation of lifting you from your chair.
- Imagine that you are sitting on the toilet to pass urine and try to stop yourself from producing a stream of urine. You should be using the same group of muscles that you used before but you will find this a little more difficult. Do not try to stop the urinary stream when you are actually passing water because this may cause problems with bladder emptying.
- Try to tighten the muscles around your back passage and vagina, lifting up inside as if you are trying to stop passing wind and urine at the same time. Try to avoid tensing your abdomen, squeezing your legs together, tightening your buttocks or holding your breath. If you can master this, most of the muscle contraction should be coming from the pelvic floor.

## How do I practise the exercises?

You need to develop two types of muscle activity, slow and fast:

- To practice slow contractions do the exercises above and try to hold the pelvic floor tight for up to ten seconds. Rest for four seconds and then repeat the contraction as many times as you can up to a maximum of ten contracts.
- To practice quick contractions which will protect you against leakage during coughing, laughing or exercise, draw the pelvic floor rapidly upwards and hold this for one second. Repeat up to a maximum of ten times.

Aim to do one set of slow contractions followed by one set of fast contractions six times a day.

## Are there any other tips?

- Get into the habit of doing your exercises regularly and linking them to everyday activities eg. Do them after emptying your bladder, while answering the telephone or whenever you turn on a tap.
- If you are not sure you are doing the exercises correctly, insert a thumb or two fingers into the vagina and try the exercises. You should feel a gentle squeeze as the muscles contract;
- Use the pelvic floor exercises to prevent leakage ie. Before you do anything which might make you leak. This way, your control will gradually improve;
- Drink normally (at least six to eight cups per day) avoiding caffeine if you can;
- Avoid going to the toilet 'just in case'. Go only when you feel that your bladder is full

- Watch your weight. Extra weight puts more strain on your pelvic floor muscles;
- Pelvic floor exercises should give the best results three to six months, but you should continue them for life to safeguard against problems recurring.

You are strongly recommended to seek help from a health professional if you see little or no change in your symptoms after trying these exercises for three months;

Other methods which help some women included: weighted vaginal cones, biofeedback and electrical stimulation. Consult your urologist or specialist nurse for more details.

## How do I get more information?

You can obtain more information about continence problems from:

The Continence Foundation  
307 Hatton Square  
16 Baldwins Gardens  
London  
EC1N 7RJ

(Phone 020 7831 9831)

[www.continence-foundation.org.uk](http://www.continence-foundation.org.uk)