

# Patient information

## Pelvic floor exercises for Women

### Information for women

The pelvic floor muscles form a broad muscular sling across the base of the pelvis. They support the position of the pelvic organs and help the closure mechanisms of the bladder and bowel.

Maintaining pelvic floor strength is important for bladder and bowel control as well as sexual function. It is also important to minimise any downward strain onto the pelvic floor throughout your life to prevent gynaecological problems occurring. Incontinence and prolapse are all too common problems and can relate to many causes:

- |                              |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| * Pregnancy and childbirth   | * Recurrent coughing/sneezing |
| * Chronic constipation       | * Hormonal changes            |
| * Occupational heavy Lifting | * Reduced muscle activity     |
| * Weight gain                | * Family history              |

Daily exercises to improve pelvic floor muscle strength will ease symptoms of leaking urine and help support any laxity within the vagina or prolapse.

### The basic exercise

Sit or lie comfortably with your legs slightly apart.

Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind. Once you feel the back passage drawing in, try and work this feeling forward into the vagina, as if closing the urinary passage too. This feeling of 'squeezing and lifting' internally is called the basic pelvic floor contraction.

It is important to do these exercises correctly. Do Not Tighten Your Buttocks/Thighs or hold your breath as you work the pelvic floor muscles.

Ensure the muscles 'let go' or relax fully when you stop tightening.

If you experience any abdomen/pelvic pain during or after exercising these muscles please discuss with your Women's Health specialist

Once you are sure that you are working these muscles correctly you are ready to start a strengthening programme.

### Your home programme

Work in any comfortable position: sitting, lying, and standing. You may need to do them little and often to begin with if the muscles tire quickly. Do the pelvic floor exercises **a minimum of 3 times per day**.

### **Long squeezes**

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, hold them as tightly as you can for \_\_\_\_\_seconds, then release and let them fully relax for 5 seconds. Repeat this squeeze and relax sequence \_\_\_\_\_times or until you feel the muscles tire.

### **Short squeezes**

Pull up the pelvic floor muscles quickly and tightly, then immediately let go fully.

Repeat \_\_\_\_\_times

### **Abdominal recruitment**

You may feel your lower abdominal muscles contract when you lift up your pelvic floor muscles. This is normal as these muscles often work together.

### **General points**

You should do these exercises at least 3 times a day and **aim** to squeeze for 10 seconds, 10 times each time.

Build up your exercises gradually and you should notice an improvement within 3 months. Missing days will delay your improvement. Once your symptoms have improved, you can reduce your exercises to a maintenance level, but this will need to be continued for life.

Remembering the exercises is often the most difficult part! Try a reminder on your phone or one of the pelvic floor exerciser apps on the market, such as the 'Squeezy' app. Try associating them with an activity such as boiling a kettle or after you have been to the toilet. It is important not to exercise the pelvic floor whilst actually passing urine or if you have a catheter in situ.

### **Decreasing the strain on your pelvic floor**

Avoid unnecessary strain such as heavy pushing, pulling or lifting.

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as you engage in activities which increase pressure on your pelvic floor such as lifting, coughing and sneezing.

It is important to avoid constipation and straining. Straining puts pressure onto the pelvic floor and over time will weaken vaginal tissues. Ensure that you have a balanced diet and drink adequate fluids. The following tips may be helpful in avoiding straining.

Sit comfortably on the toilet with your legs slightly apart. Check that your knees are higher than your hips. A foot stool may help especially if your toilet seat is high. Rest your elbows on your knees. Relax your jaw. As you relax your pelvic floor to open your bowels relax your abdominal wall and make a gentle effort to widen your waist. See the Bowel Control trust leaflet for further guidance.

Weight gain will increase pressure on your pelvic floor muscles.

If you are leaking whilst exercising try a low impact activity such as walking or swimming. Speak with your Women's Health Physiotherapist for further exercise guidance.

### **Sources of information**

Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy Courses and Publications

## Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team - Tel: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 135860 or by email: [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net)

## Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other formats

**If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.**

**Tel: 0300 131 4500**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy Department

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Responsible clinician/author: Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Team Directorate: OOH

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