Patient Information for the
Gloucestershire Health Community

Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women

GHPI0259_11_07
Author: Physiotherapy
Review due: November 2010

How will I know if I am getting better?

The pelvic floor exercises should give optimum results with regular exercise within three to six months.

If you see little or no change in your symptoms after trying the exercises for three months it is recommended that you seek help from a health professional.

For further information contact:

Cheltenham General Hospital - 08454 222344

Cirencester Hospital - 01285 884523

Gloucester Royal Hospital - 08454 228527

Stroud - 01453 562266

Sandpits Clinic - 01453562050

Lydney Hospital - 01594 598235

The following points may help you to benefit more from pelvic floor exercises.

1. Try to keep to your correct weight as this will reduce the amount of strain placed on your muscles and may make an improvement to your symptoms.
2. Avoid drinking coffee as it contains caffeine, which can stimulate your urinary tract. Caffeine is also present in tea, cola and chocolate.
3. Avoid constipation as straining forces the bowels open and this stretches the pelvic floor muscles. Ensure you are drinking adequate fluid and check your diet. If the problem persists see your GP.
4. Make sure you tighten your pelvic floor muscles before lifting and keep it tight until you have lowered the load.
5. Straight sit-ups and double leg lifts put severe pressure on the pelvic floor and back so if they cause you a problem try and avoid them.
6. If you have any symptoms during exercise try to avoid any activity with high impact where both feet are off the ground at once.
7. When you sit on the toilet, sit comfortably with your knees apart. Keep your feet on the floor and relax.
8. Completely empty your bladder each time you go to the toilet, without straining. It may help to lean forward as you pass urine. After you have finished, try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles.

Remember

You should drink approximately 3-4 pints of liquid a day. Do not restrict your intake; it will not reduce your symptoms. You should aim to keep your urine a pale straw colour.

This leaflet tells you how to exercise and strengthen your pelvic floor.

Where are the pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor muscles form a sling, which runs between the bottom of your spine (coccyx) and the bone between your legs (pubic bone).

What do pelvic floor muscles do?

- They support the pelvic organs i.e. bladder, uterus and rectum, especially when you are standing or exercising.
- They support the bladder and help it stay closed.
- They control wind and when “holding on” with your bowels.
- They increase sexual satisfaction during sexual intercourse.

The pelvic floor muscles can weaken. This can happen after childbirth, as a result of constipation, chronic cough, being overweight, menopausal changes, persistent heavy lifting and after pelvic surgery.

What happens if the pelvic floor muscles do not work properly?

- Leakage of urine on exercise or coughing
- Reduction in bowel control
- Sensation of a prolapse e.g. a feeling of heaviness or lowness in the vagina
- Decreased satisfaction during intercourse

One of the most effective things you can do to reduce these symptoms is to try and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.

How should I do a pelvic floor muscle exercise?

Imagine you are trying to stop passing wind and at the same time trying to stop the flow of urine midstream. You should feel a sensation of 'squeeze and lift' as you close and draw up the back and front passages. Hold this for as many seconds as you can (up to a maximum of 10 seconds). At the end of the hold there should be a definite feeling of 'letting go'.

It's easy to use the wrong muscles instead of the pelvic floor muscles. Try not to:

- Pull in your tummy
- Squeeze your legs together
- Clench your buttocks
- Hold your breath

There are a few ways you can check that you are doing the exercise properly.

1. Place one or two fingers into the vagina and squeeze the muscles until you can feel your vagina tighten around your fingers.
2. During sexual activity try to squeeze your pelvic floor.
3. Check with a mirror; hold a mirror so you can see the area between your legs. Squeeze the muscles. The skin between the anus and vagina should move away from the mirror.
4. Stop the flow of urine in the middle of passing water. This is not an exercise. You should only do it once to find the correct muscles. Make sure you completely empty your bladder after doing this.

If you are still unsure please seek help from physiotherapist or continence nurse.

How often and how many?

It is recommended that 24 exercises are performed daily. To avoid over tiring the muscle only 8 holds should be performed at a time with at least 5 seconds rest in between each hold. So

try doing 8 holds 3 times a day. It is important to practice the exercise in a variety of positions.

1. Lying

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your knees apart. Tighten your pelvic floor as if you are trying to prevent wind and stop the flow of urine. Hold the contraction as strongly as you can (a maximum contraction).

In this position you may find it easier to achieve a feeling of lift.

You may prefer contracting the muscle lying on your side or on your front.

2. Sitting

Sit on a chair with your knees apart and tighten your pelvic floor muscles as before.

3. Standing

Stand with your feet apart and tighten the pelvic floor muscles as before.

You can progress these exercises by trying to hold the "squeeze and lift" for longer. As the exercise gets easier you may like to try tightening the muscle when walking, as described below:

Occasionally try lifting your pelvic floor up halfway to your maximum when walking. If you find this difficult, start by getting used to holding halfway in standing before moving on to walking. Gradually increase the distance you can hold for.

Are there any other exercises I can do?

It is important to be able to contract the muscles quickly, for instance when you cough or sneeze. Try and contract the muscle quickly up to a maximum of 10 times.

Try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles prior to sneezing, coughing etc. This will help to control and reduce leakage of urine.