



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Pelvic Floor Exercises

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Department

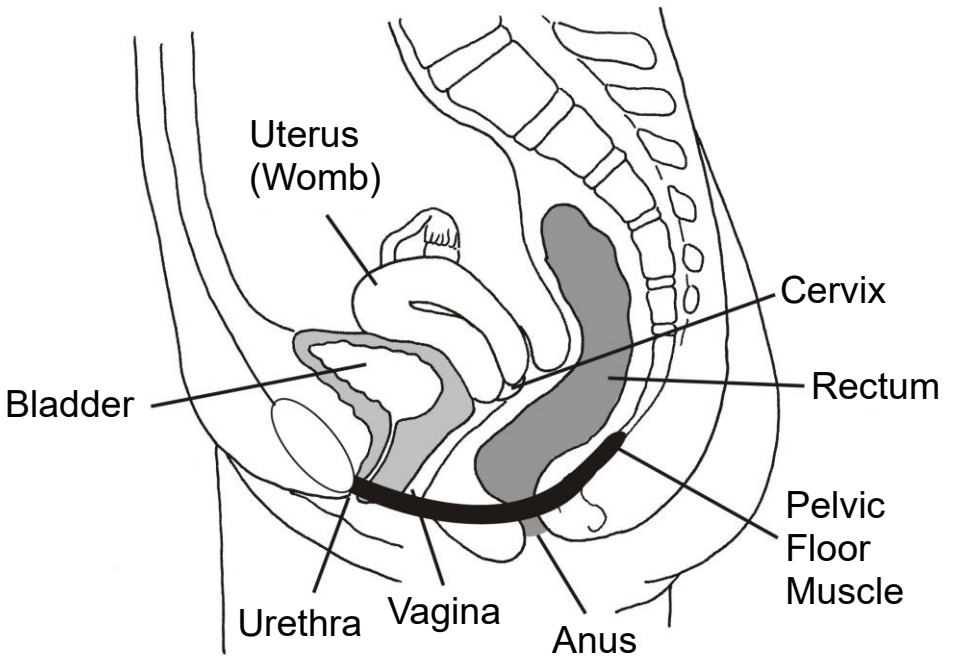
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Pelvic floor muscles



The pelvic floor muscles are attached to the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis and the coccyx (tailbone) at the back of the pelvis/base of the spine, forming a platform of muscle in between the legs.

The pelvic floor muscles help to support the bladder, bowel and uterus (womb).

The pelvic floor muscles also help to improve sexual satisfaction.

Weak pelvic floor muscles

Weak pelvic floor muscles can lead to:

- Urinary incontinence = leaking with coughing, laughing, sneezing, lifting or during sporting activity.
- Unable to control wind
- Bowel incontinence = leaking poo
- Poor sexual satisfaction or leaking urine during intercourse.
- Pelvic organ prolapse = discomfort in the vagina/pelvic floor, a feeling of something 'coming down' or bulging vaginally.
- Urgency = a strong urge to empty the bladder, sometimes with leaking of urine.

Why does the pelvic floor become weak?

- Childbirth – regardless of how your baby was born.
- Constipation – straining to empty your bowel.
- Repeated heavy lifting.
- Menopause
- Being overweight = puts extra strain and load on your pelvic floor.
- Persistent/chronic cough.
- Being generally unfit.
- Following a period of inactivity e.g. through illness, surgery.

How can exercises help?

The aim of physiotherapy treatment is to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles to make them bulkier and stronger so they provide better and stronger support to the pelvic organs and speed up the reaction of the muscles. This improves the function of the muscle giving you better bladder, wind and bowel control.

Your muscles will start to feel stronger by doing regular pelvic floor exercises.

There are no known risks to pelvic floor exercises.

Learning to do the exercises

In sitting, standing or lying, focus on your pelvic floor muscles by squeezing at the back passage as if trying to stop wind and squeezing forwards and up as if **imagining** stopping the flow of urine. Try not to hold your breath or clench your buttocks.

Practicing your pelvic floor exercises

Exercise 1 – Slow squeeze

Squeeze, 'pull up' from the back passage and hold.

Hold tightened for seconds, then relax for seconds to allow the muscle to recover.

Repeat times.

As the muscles get stronger you will find that you can hold for longer and do more repetitions.

Exercise 2 – Fast squeeze

Squeeze and 'pull up' from the back passage quickly and then relax and repeat.

Try forquick squeezes'.

This exercise will also help with the control of wind.

Carry out these exercises **THREE** times every day

To help you to remember to carry out the exercises every day you can link them with a regular activity such as watching a TV programme or cleaning your teeth etc.

Exercise 3 – ‘The knack’

Practice using your muscles regularly throughout the day with every day activities:

Squeeze and ‘pull up’ when you are about to cough or sneeze or pass wind.

Squeeze and pull up when lifting and when pulling or pushing something eg. a trolley or wheelie bin.

This will help to strengthen your muscles and also speed up the reaction of the muscles improving bladder, bowel and wind control.

Remember

Exercises are for life. Once you have improved your pelvic floor strength, don’t forget to continue with the exercises.

Try not to hold your breath when practicing your pelvic floor exercises.

Manage your weight - excess weight puts extra strain on your muscles.

Stay motivated.

Try to include 30 minutes of general exercise everyday such as walking, cycling, swimming.

Tips for a healthy bladder and bowel

Avoid going to the toilet 'just in case'. Only go when your bladder feels full but don't leave it more than four hours during the day.

Try not to empty your bladder too frequently as this can reduce its capacity. Try **not** to go more than once every two hours. You can try sitting on something firm, crossing your legs or try to distract yourself by doing something else e.g. count backwards from 100.

Aim to drink one and half to two litres (three to four pints) of fluid per day.

Some fluids can irritate your bladder making you feel like you need to pass urine more frequently for example, caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee and green tea; fizzy drinks like Pepsi or Coca-Cola; acidic drinks or drinks high in vitamin C such as blackcurrant juice, fresh orange/apple/grapefruit and cranberry juice.

A balanced diet including a mix of fibre will help to improve your bowel pattern and stool consistency.

Healthy bowel emptying position

- a) Knees higher than hips.
- b) Lean forwards with elbows on knees.
- c) Allow your tummy to bulge.
- d) Focus on breathing out as if steaming up a mirror or blowing out candles. Avoid holding your breath.



Squeeze and 'pull up' your pelvic floor, especially around the back passage, after emptying your bowel and before you wipe.

For additional information and advice go to:

www.thepogp.co.uk

Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy
(POGP) website

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

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Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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Owner	Deborah Plowman, Clinical Lead, Pelvic Health Physiotherapy
Date first issued	May 2013
Review Date	December 2023
Version	4 (issued December 2020)
Approved by	Alison Brown, AHP Senior Manager
Document Reference	PIL 606 v4
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