

Stress incontinence information sheet

Leakage when you cough, run, jump laugh or sneeze may be called “stress incontinence”. It can be caused or aggravated by childbirth, being overweight, constipation and chronic coughing. It is due to a weakness in the pelvic floor muscle. It is very important that you do not reduce your fluid intake as this may actually make your problem worse, and can cause constipation.

Physiotherapists, doctors and nurses know that pelvic floor exercises can help you to improve your bladder control. When done correctly, pelvic floor exercises can build up and strengthen the muscles to help you hold urine.



Do not feel embarrassed – studies show that as many as one woman in three have this symptom.

Pelvic floor exercises

The pelvic floor

Layers of muscle stretch like a hammock from the pubic bone in front to the bottom of the backbone. These firm supportive muscles are called the pelvic floor. They help to hold the bladder, womb and bowel in place and to close the bladder outlet and back passage.

How the pelvic floor works



The muscles of the pelvic floor are kept firm and slightly tense to stop leakage of urine from the bladder or faeces from the bowel. When you pass water or have a bowel motion the pelvic floor muscles relax. Afterwards, they tighten again to restore control.

Pelvic floor muscles can become weak and sag because of childbirth, lack of exercise, the change of life or just getting older. Weak muscles give you less control and you may leak urine, especially with exercise or when you cough, sneeze or laugh.

How pelvic floor exercises can help

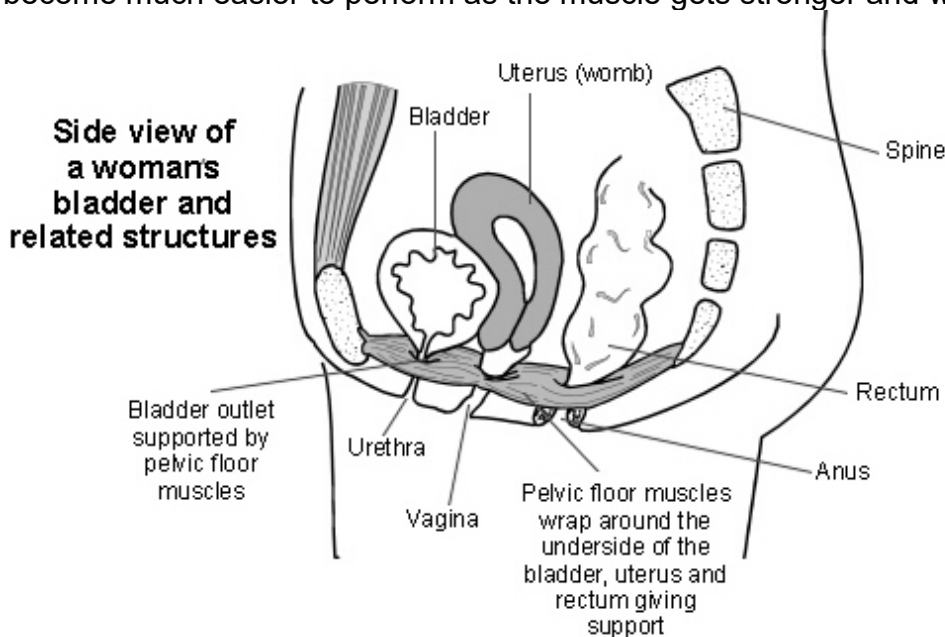


Pelvic floor exercises can strengthen these muscles so that they once again give support. This will improve your bladder control and improve or stop leakage of urine. Like any other muscles in the body, the more you use and exercise them, the stronger the pelvic floor will be.

How to do your pelvic floor exercises

1. Sit comfortably with knees/ legs slightly apart. Without moving your tummy muscle or bottom, try to squeeze the muscle around the back passage. Pretend you are trying to stop wind from escaping!
2. Now try the same with front part of the muscle. Again without moving the tummy or bottom, squeeze and lift the muscle into the vagina. Moving this front part of the muscle is harder and takes time to practice.
3. Once you can tighten and lift the muscles (lifting is as though you are taking the muscle up steps one at a time), pull as hard as you can and hold for as long as you can (e.g. 5 seconds), then relax. Repeat this 5-10 times with a good 'rest' for 10 seconds between each contraction. Do the group of 5-10 slow pull up exercises three times a day without making your muscle ache.
4. Now try to squeeze your muscle quickly like a one-second 'flick', then relax. Repeat this quick pull up exercise five times. Only do this once before your group of slow contractions.
5. These two actions of moving your muscle – i.e. slowly and then fast – will strengthen the pelvic floor muscle so that you will be able to do more repetitions and hold the squeeze longer. This will make the muscles strong and powerful.

You may find pelvic floor exercises difficult at first, but you will need patience and perseverance in order to improve. All exercise needs to be repeated regularly in order to get a good result and the pelvic floor is no exception. Try doing them sitting, standing and lying down. You may notice an improvement in 6 – 8 weeks if you perform the exercises as above. The pelvic floor exercises will become much easier to perform as the muscle gets stronger and will become a habit.



Your personal Pelvic floor exercise programme

Number of slow pull up exercises..... and hold for	
Rest for 5 -10 seconds	
Number of fast pull up exercises:	