

Improving your bladder control

There are other simple measures you can take to promote a healthy bladder and pelvic floor.

- To prevent or reduce urine leakage, squeeze the pelvic floor muscles tightly *at the same time* as you do any activity that usually causes urine leakage. This procedure is called *The Knack*
- Maintain a reasonable fluid intake for your weight of approximately 30ml per kg in 24 hours
- Reduce the intake of caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee, chocolate and fizzy drinks, as these can increase bladder and bowel symptoms
- Avoid constipation and straining
- Avoid heavy lifting

- If overweight, aim to reduce your weight to an acceptable level for your height and build
- A persistent cough can make it more likely that you leak urine. It is very important that you always tighten your pelvic floor muscles during any coughing and also seek advice from your Doctor
- Smoking can make a cough worse and also increases the risk of cancers, including bladder cancer. If you would like help in stopping smoking, see your Doctor or Nurse for advice
- If you see any blood in your urine, you must contact your Doctor or Nurse for advice (make sure this is not from a monthly period)

In the UK, there are over nine million women with some form of bladder problem¹

Pelvic floor muscle training lasting at least three months, is the first-line treatment for stress and mixed urinary incontinence²

If the advice given in this leaflet does not improve your symptoms, further advice and help is available from:

- Your **GP**, who may also refer you to other Specialists for advice.
 - The **Practice Nurse, District Practitioner, District Nurse** or **Health Visitor** may be able to give further advice.
 - A **Continence Specialist** or **Advisor** is an experienced Specialist Nurse, Physiotherapist or other Health Care Professional.
 - A Uro-Gynaecologist is a Gynaecologist who specialises in bladder problems for women.
 - A Urologist specialises in the branch of medicine dealing with the genitourinary system.
- The decision to refer you to the Uro-Gynaecologist or Urologist is usually made by your GP. In some areas, other professionals can make this referral. **Details of the services available in your area are available from your Health Trust, Clinic or Health Centre, or GP Practice.** There are many useful organisations which may be of further help and support, such as the Bladder and Bowel Foundation at www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org Tel: 0845 345 0165 Details of other organisations are available from your GP or local Continence Service.

¹ Bladder and Bowel Foundation, 2011 ² National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), CG171, Urinary Incontinence in Women, September 2013

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Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises for Women

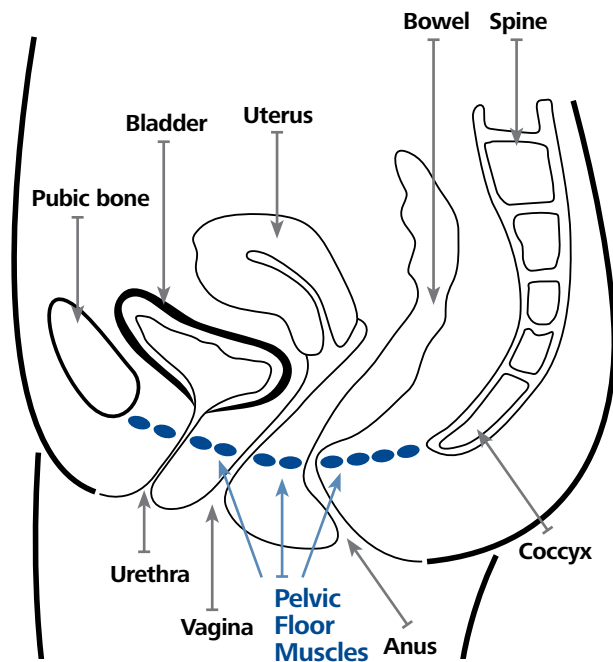
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About your pelvic floor muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are shaped like a shallow bowl and are attached to the pelvis between the bone at the lower part of the tummy (pubic bone) to the base of the spine (coccyx). See diagram. There are three openings in the pelvic floor, one for the urethra which carries urine from the bladder, one for the vagina (birth canal) and one through which the bowel empties (anus).

The pelvic floor muscles:

- Support the bladder where urine is stored, the uterus (womb), and the bowel
- Assist normal bladder and bowel function and prevent leakage (incontinence)
- Contribute to sexual function



What might affect the pelvic floor muscles?

In women, the pelvic floor muscles may be affected as a result of:

- Pregnancy
- Following childbirth
- Changes due to the menopause
- Persistent constipation
- Chest problems with a chronic cough
- Being overweight
- Being generally unfit
- Some medical conditions
- Lifting heavy loads at work or home

Weak pelvic floor muscles can result in urine leakage on effort or exertion, or on sneezing, coughing or laughing

How to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

You will need to learn, and regularly carry out, your pelvic floor muscle exercises.

To begin, choose a quiet time and place, so you can concentrate on learning the exercises correctly.

Sit, stand or lie down, with your feet comfortably apart. You can do the exercises in any of these positions. Relax and breathe normally.



Pelvic floor muscle exercises

You are going to learn to carry out both slow and fast pelvic floor muscle exercises.

☺ **Slow exercise**
Concentrate, then squeeze and lift the pelvic floor muscles as if you are trying to stop yourself from passing urine. Then tighten the muscles around the back passage, as if you are trying not to pass wind. By doing these two together, you should be exercising your pelvic floor muscles.

If you want to check you are tightening the correct muscles, you can try placing a small mirror between your legs and look at the skin between your vagina and anus. This area moves up and inwards when you contract your pelvic floor muscles.

☺ **Fast exercise**
Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and squeeze for as long as you can, then 'let go' and relax for about 4 seconds, then repeat. You may only be able to hold for a few seconds to begin with, but your aim is to hold for 10 seconds, repeated at least 8 times. To begin with, watch a second hand on a clock to time this.

☺ **You have the best chance of success if you practice doing these slow and fast contractions 3 times every day for at least three months.**

Each month, you can monitor your progress below:

Date	Hold for?	Number of slow squeezes	Number of fast squeezes
(Start)	secs	times	times
	secs	times	times
	secs	times	times
	secs	times	times
	secs	times	times