

# Pelvic floor exercises for women



## Information for patients

Continence Service



**PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



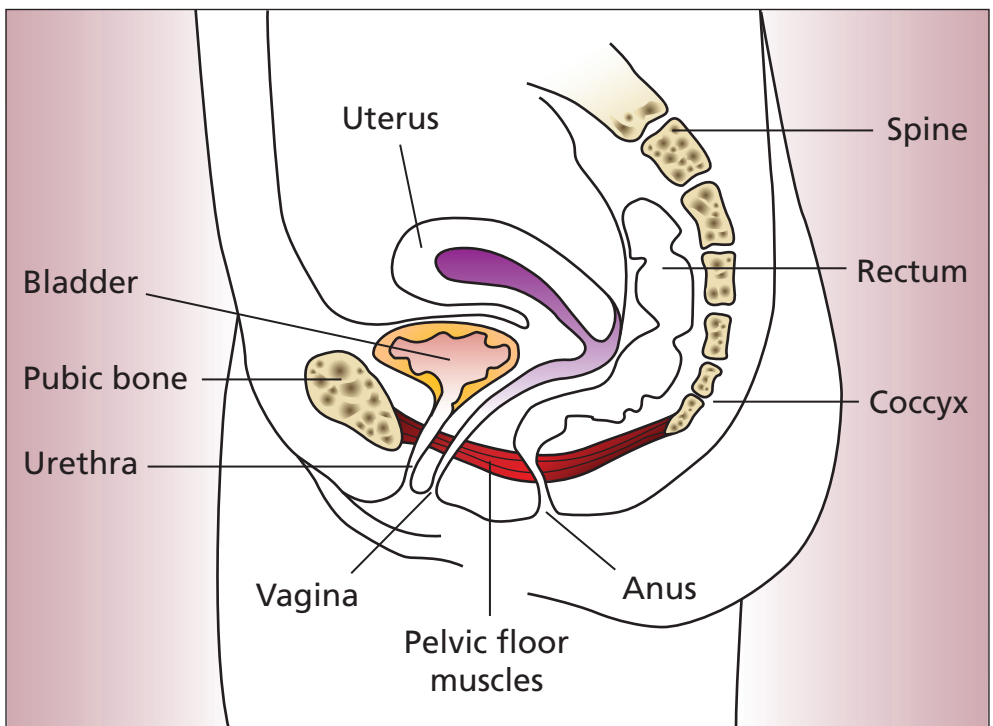


## Why do I need to do pelvic floor exercises?

Many women experience pelvic floor problems at some time during their life. Problems with your pelvic floor muscles can affect your bladder, bowel and sexual function.

Your pelvic floor muscles span the base of your pelvis to keep your pelvic organs in the correct position (prevent prolapse), tightly close your bladder / bowel and help with sex.

Your pelvic floor muscles need to be strong, but they also need to work in the correct way at the right time.



## Why do the pelvic floor muscles get weak?

There are many possible causes of pelvic floor muscle problems. These problems may be linked to pregnancy, childbirth or the menopause and can be made worse by smoking, obesity or constipation.

## What are the symptoms of weak pelvic floor muscles?

Symptoms of a weak pelvic floor may include:

- Leaking urine when coughing, sneezing or exercising
- Leaking urine with a sudden feeling you need to go to the toilet
- Anal incontinence which is leaking of stools or difficulty in controlling wind
- A prolapse which may be felt as a general pelvic discomfort or a 'feeling of something coming down'
- Reduced sensation or satisfaction with sexual intercourse or even urine leakage

## How do I check that I'm exercising my pelvic floor muscles correctly?

To tighten the pelvic floor muscles, imagine you are trying to stop passing wind, gently tighten your vagina and then tighten around your front passage as if trying to stop the flow of urine.

Use a small mirror to look at the area between your legs. The skin between your vagina and back passage should move up and inwards away from the mirror when you contract your pelvic floor.

If you see a bulging away from you then **stop!** Try and draw your pelvic floor inwards so there is no bulging. It is important for you to mention this to your continence advisor.

Feel inside your vagina with your index finger. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and you should feel the muscles tightening around your finger.

If you are sexually active, you could try to squeeze your pelvic floor during penetrative sex.

It is normal to feel some gentle tightening in your lower abdominal muscles when you do pelvic floor exercises. It is important you breathe normally as well.

It takes approximately 3 to 6 months to notice an improvement.

There are two different kinds of exercise. You should always practice both kinds of exercises. Try to do these exercises 3 - 4 times a day.

### **Gentle long holds:**

- Lie or sit in a comfortable position.
- Relax and breathe in. As you breathe out, gently pull in the pelvic floor muscles and continue to breathe normally.
- Hold the muscle for a few seconds and then release the muscle fully.
- Repeat this 5 times.
- You may not feel much happening at first but keep trying.
- Build up to a 10 second gentle hold and repeat 10 times. Rest for 5 seconds between each squeeze.

### **Quick, short squeeze:**

- Pull up the pelvic floor muscle as quickly and strongly as you can and then let go immediately.
- Rest for 2 seconds and then do it again.
- Repeat this 10 times.

Later on you should be able to practice both these exercises when you are in a standing position. Remember that it is important to do pelvic floor exercises for the rest of your life.

## **Pre-squeeze before you sneeze**

The pelvic floor muscles should not push down when you cough and, to prevent this from happening, you should always tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you cough. You should also feel the muscles tightening before you sneeze, laugh or do simple things like getting up off a chair.

## **What if I forget to do my exercises?**

Pelvic floor muscle exercises should become a part of your daily routine for the rest of your life. You can easily forget to do your pelvic floor exercises but here are a few ideas that may help to prompt you.

- It may be helpful to use reminder notes at home or at work
- You could do your pelvic floor after you have been to the toilet
- You could do your exercises at meal times
- You could use a smart phone app such as the 'NHS Squeezy' app

Try to incorporate your pelvic floor exercises into your activities of daily living. For example, when you are lifting or walking, try to squeeze your pelvic floor at the same time.

## Where can I find further information?

The following organisations have a lot of useful information and advice:

- **The Bladder and Bowel Community**  
<https://www.bladderandbowel.org/>
- **Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy**  
<https://pogp.csp.org.uk/>



To help support your local hospitals visit  
[sheffieldhospitalscharity.org.uk](https://sheffieldhospitalscharity.org.uk)

Registered Charity No. 1165762



**Alternative formats can be available on request.  
Please email: [sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net](mailto:sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net)**

**© Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust 2019**

Re-use of all or any part of this document is governed by copyright and the "Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005" SI 2005 No. 1515. Information on re-use can be obtained from the Information Governance Department, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Email [sth.infogov@nhs.net](mailto:sth.infogov@nhs.net)