

Pelvic Floor Advice and Exercises

The pelvic floor muscles form a broad muscular sling across the base of the pelvis. They are not horizontal to the floor but tilted downwards at an angle so that the front is lower than the back. These muscles support the position of the pelvic organs and help the closure mechanisms of the bladder and bowel whilst giving support via the vagina.

Incontinence and prolapse are common problems with several factors contributing to symptoms:

- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Chronic constipation
- Occupational heavy lifting
- Being overweight
- Sustained coughing
- Hormonal changes, e.g. menopause
- Increasing age

Daily exercises of your pelvic floor muscles will help to ease symptoms of urinary leaking and support and prolapse or laxity within the vaginal tissues. To prevent any of these problems getting worse, it is also important to minimise any downward strain in the pelvic floor, for example, straining with constipation or coughing with a cold.

How to do pelvic exercises

Sit comfortably or rest lying on your side or your back with knees bent and legs apart. These are good starting positions if these exercises are new to you.

Close the back passage as if you are trying to stop yourself passing wind. Once you feel the back passage drawing in, try and work this feeling forward into the vagina as if closing the passage of urine too. This feeling of squeezing and lifting is the basic pelvic floor contraction.

Easy effort

It is important to do these exercises correctly. Try always to work with easy effort and easy breathing. There should be no jaw clenching, buttock clenching or inner thigh clenching. Don't hold your breath but breathe as you work.

Try also to feel how the muscles let go when you stop working them.

If you are unsure about the exercises, a specialist Chartered physiotherapist will be able to advise you. An internal examination may be helpful to assess the strength of these muscles.

Exercise programme

Work in any comfortable position: sitting, standing,, lying on your side or on your back with your knees bent.

1. Slowly tighten the pelvic floor muscles, closing around the back passage and the front passage by pulling up deep inside. Hold for 10 seconds if you can.

Rest for 10 seconds

Repeat 10 times

2. Pull up the pelvic floor muscles quickly and tightly, then immediately let go. Try and do 10 fast contractions as quickly as you can.

Try and do the above exercises a minimum of three times a day.

Functional Work... A LIFETIME HABIT

It is important to use the strength in these muscles to support the bladder, pelvic organs and the lower back in advance of any exertion, e.g. coughing, sneezing, laughing, bending, lifting etc. Anticipate these activities in advance and pull up strongly with the pelvic floor. This will help to minimise or prevent leakage.

If you have a prolapse it is especially important that you avoid heavy lifting and you do have to lift, pull up tightly with the pelvic floor first.

If urinary is a problem, anticipate times when the bladder is urgent and messaging strongly. Gently tighten the muscles of the pelvic floor, sustaining for up to 20 seconds to block the messages from the bladder and to help bladder control.

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