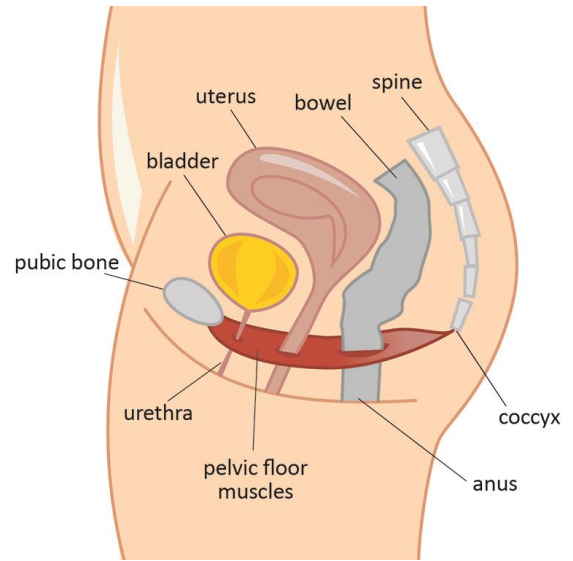


Pelvic Floor Exercises

What are Pelvic Floor Muscles?

One cause of bowel problems is weak pelvic floor muscles. If the muscles are weak then faecal urgency, faecal leakage, or leakage of wind, is much more common.

The pelvic floor muscles run from your pubic bone at the front to the coccyx at the back. Their main job is to hold the pelvic organs in place and to stop any leakage of urine and faeces. Training these muscles strengthens them so that they can support to your bowel, preventing leakage. Pelvic floor muscles should be kept strong and active just like any other muscle in your body.



Overactivity

Occasionally, your pelvic floor muscles can become overactive. This can often be in reaction to stress. Overactivity is not the same thing as being strong. Having overactive muscles means that the muscles cannot contract and relax properly. This can contribute to constipation, as the pelvic floor muscles are not able to relax properly in order to evacuate a stool. To overcome this, it is important to relax your pelvic floor muscles after each pelvic floor muscle squeeze that you do. In addition, it can be worthwhile considering whether your bowel problem is related to stress and addressing this problem separately.

How Do I Exercise Them?

In a comfortable lying or sitting position imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and urine at the same time; drawing the pelvic floor muscles upwards and forwards from the back passage towards the bladder. You may feel a lifting up and tightening as your muscles contract. Try not to hold your breath and keep your buttocks and legs relaxed. Let your pelvic floor relax after every muscle contraction.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises should include long and short squeezes.

Long Squeezes

- Tighten your pelvic floor, hold, and then relax fully. How long can you hold the squeeze?
- Repeat until the muscles tire. How many times can you repeat the squeezes?

Short Squeezes

- Quickly tighten your pelvic floor muscles, then immediately let them go. How many times can you do this before the muscles tire?

If you practice this then write down the numbers you get. These figures are then your baseline for your exercise program. For example, if you can hold for 5 seconds, repeat this 3 times, and do 8 short ones, then this is your exercise program to begin with. You need to do pelvic floor exercises three times a day. So, repeat your baseline 3 times a day.

Over time, build up your exercise routine. Every few weeks see if you can hold for a bit longer, or do a few more repetitions. Eventually, aim for 10 long squeezes, holding each for 10 seconds, followed by 10 short squeezes.

As your muscles improve, aim to do your exercises in other positions such as standing up. Eventually, practice using these muscles whilst doing activities such as walking and bending.

In addition to exercising them three times a day, try to use the muscles in your day to day activities too. For example, every time you cough, sneeze, or lift anything, consciously contract your pelvic floor muscles. This strategy immediately helps to decrease leakage.

Remembering to Exercise

Many women start off with the best intentions but find they forget to do their exercises. Some women associate it with an activity (e.g. mealtimes, or brushing your teeth). Some women put an alarm on their phone. Some women also find downloading an app (e.g. Squeezy) can help to remind them.

