



PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES



WOMEN

The pelvic floor is a hammock of muscle that stretches between the tailbone of the spine (on your back) and the pubic bone in front. It supports your bladder and bowel (and uterus in women). Pelvic floor exercises increase the strength of your pelvic floor. Having a strong pelvic floor improves your bladder and bowel control.



MEN

Weak pelvic floor muscles can affect your control of urine. This may mean anything from a little bit of urine dribbling out when you cough or sneeze, through to not being able to hold urine in at all. There are exercises you can do that will help strengthen these muscles and give you better control.

Signs and symptoms

Weak pelvic floor muscles

- Wetting yourself when you cough, sneeze, strain, jog, lift or laugh
- Difficulty holding on when you need to go to the toilet
- An urgent need to empty your bladder or bowel or loss of bladder or bowel control
- Poor control of anal wind when bending or lifting.

For women

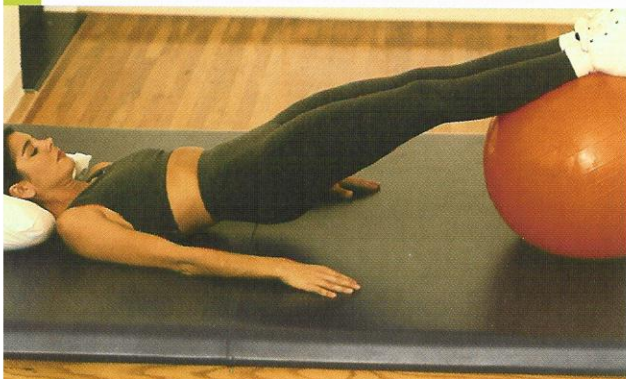
- Difficulty keeping tampons in place
- Passing air from the vagina
- The uterus or rectum prolapses (moves down out of its normal position in the body)
- Vaginal bulging, dragging or a heavy feeling
- Reduced vaginal sensation.

Self care

- Do your pelvic floor exercises each day. You can do them anywhere without anyone noticing (e.g. when driving, doing the dishes, waiting for a bus, or reading)
- Do not become constipated and avoid straining to pass a motion (see *Constipation* Fact Card).
- Eat a balanced diet and keep a healthy weight (see *Nutrition* fact cards)
- Exercise regularly (see *Exercise* fact cards)
- Continue to drink water.

Women

- Ask your doctor to check the strength of your pelvic floor muscles when you have your Pap test (see *Breast Awareness & Pap Test* Fact Card).
- Prepare your pelvic floor muscles for childbirth and recondition them as soon as possible afterwards. If you have an episiotomy, exercising the pelvic floor muscles will speed the healing process.



Exercises – for making pelvic floor muscles stronger

- Check with a continence adviser or physiotherapist to make sure you are doing these exercises properly
- If your urine control does not improve, see your doctor.

Finding your pelvic floor

- When next passing urine, stop the flow mid-stream. It should stop completely, not just slow to a trickle. Then relax and finish passing urine. The muscles you tighten and pull upwards to stop the urine flow are your pelvic floor muscles. Only do this to learn what are the right muscles to use, as doing this too often will interfere with your bladder.
- Imagine that you are trying to stop passing wind by tightening up the muscles around the anus. Try not to squeeze your buttocks and do not push the muscles down.

Test your muscle strength

Women

- Place one or two clean fingers in your vagina and then squeeze your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel a tightening and lifting around your fingers.

Men

- With one hand lift your penis and scrotum out of the way.
- Press one finger of your other hand on the area between your anus and scrotum. When you tighten

your pelvic floor muscles, you will feel this area move up and away from your finger. If the muscles are weak, it will not rise very far, or stay up for very long.

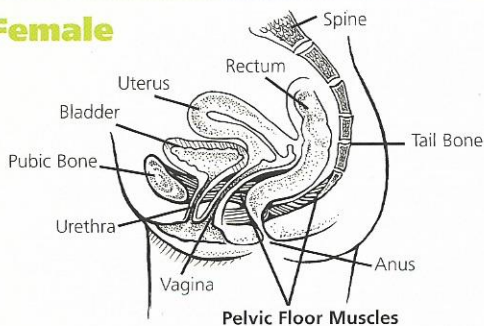
Pelvic squeezes

- Tighten and draw in the pelvic floor muscles, lifting them up inside. Hold as strongly as you can for a count of five, then release and relax.
- Repeat the lift, squeeze, release and relax up to a maximum of 10 squeezes. You should rest in between each contraction for about 10 seconds. If you find it easy to hold for a count of five, try holding for longer – up to 10 seconds.
- After a set of the exercises above, contract and relax the pelvic floor muscles quickly and strongly 5–10 times, without holding the contractions or resting between them. These quick exercises help the bladder to hold urine when it is under pressure (e.g. when you are coughing, sneezing, or lifting a heavy object).
- Do the exercises at least 4–5 times a day.

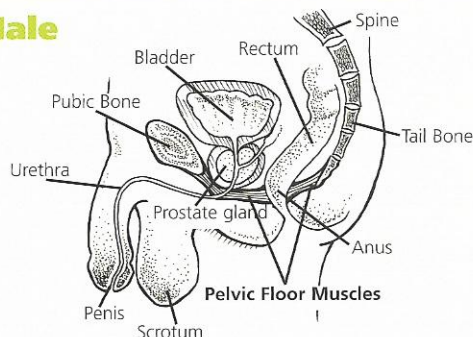
Make sure you don't use or tighten your bottom, stomach, hip or leg muscles, don't hold your breath – lift up and squeeze, don't push down.

Keep in mind it takes time to restore pelvic muscle strength and it may be a few month's before you notice an improvement.

Female



Male



Recommended reading:

Millard R

Bladder control – a simple self-help guide

MacLennan & Petty, 1995

The Continence Foundation of Australia also has a number of leaflets that may help – see Contact.

Other relevant fact cards:

- Exercise cards
- Constipation
- Prostate Problems
- Nutrition
- Bladder and Urine Control
- Breast Self Examination & Pap Test

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

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Pharmacy Self Care has a strong commitment to providing current and reliable health information.
The information in this card was current at time of printing.

Contact:

A doctor – listed under medical practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book.

Continence Foundation of Australia – National Continence Helpline 1800 330 066 or www.contfound.org.au.

A physiotherapist – contact the **Australian Physiotherapy Association** for a list of physiotherapists specialising in this area.

Your Self Care pharmacist. To find: (02) 6283 4777 or www.psa.org.au/practiceprograms/index.cfm

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

TENA Customer Service for product advice and sampling 1800 623 347.



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