

Introduction

Many men suffer from weakness of their pelvic floor muscles.

Common symptoms include:

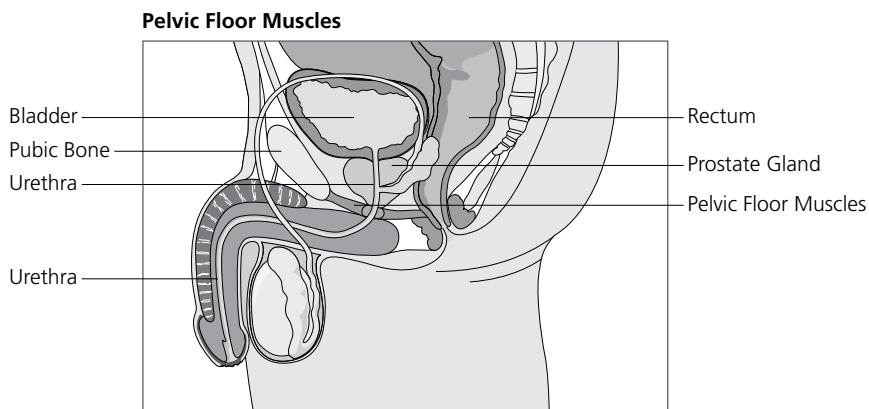
- leaking urine with activity, for example during running, jumping, coughing and sneezing
- a sudden and urgent need to pass urine
- leakage of stool from the back passage
- erectile dysfunction (the pelvic floor helps you to maintain erections).

This information is a guide to be used alongside the advice and guidance given by your Physiotherapist.

What do the pelvic floor muscles do?

The pelvic floor muscles are a supportive sling of muscles, stretching from the tailbone at the back to the pubic bone at the front. They are responsible for:

- supporting the pelvic organs – the bladder and bowel, especially when standing; they also help protect these organs from external damage
- a role in erectile function during intercourse.



Your pelvic floor muscles contract when you cough, sneeze or laugh; preventing leakage of urine.

They are kept under slight tension so that when you pass urine or open your bowels the muscles should relax and then tighten afterwards. This prevents leakage and controls the passing of urine, bowel and gas motions.

Factors leading to incontinence or weakness

- prostate surgery
- long term cough
- constipation/straining to empty your bowels
- being overweight
- pelvic trauma or some surgery
- repeated heavy lifting.

Pelvic floor muscles can be strengthened just like any other weak or damaged muscles. They need to be regularly exercised to work well.

How to exercise your pelvic floor muscles

- Sit, stand or lie comfortably with your knees slightly apart.
- Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind at the same time as if you are trying to stop passing urine; slowly squeeze and lift the muscles. You may feel the base of your penis move slightly up towards your abdomen.
- A feeling of gentle tightening in your lower abdomen is normal. Try to avoid pulling in your stomach, squeezing your legs together, tightening your buttocks or holding your breath. This will help to ensure that only your pelvic floor muscles are working.

Exercise programme

First you need to find your starting point.

To do this, tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold the contraction for as many seconds as you can, up to ten seconds.

How long can you hold the contraction?

..... **seconds.**

Release the contraction and rest for the same time. Repeat the tightening, hold, release, as many times as you can, up to a maximum of ten.

How many times can you repeat the contraction?

..... **times.**

For example, hold two seconds, rest two seconds, repeat four times.

These exercises will build the endurance of the muscles (the muscles can work harder for longer). As you improve, you will notice that you can hold your contraction for longer and do more repetitions, compared to your starting point.

When laughing, coughing and sneezing, your muscles need to be able to react quickly. It is also important to practise quick contractions. To do this, tighten the muscles quickly and strongly and then relax.

How many quick contractions can you do?

..... **times.**

Aim for ten repetitions.

Aim to increase the number of repetitions of slow and quick exercises over the next six months so that you can do up to ten at a time. You will need to practise three times per day.

Further useful tips and advice

1. Avoid being overweight

Maintaining the correct weight can make a big difference to your symptoms, by reducing the strain on the muscles that help to control bladder and bowel movements.

2. Avoid constipation

Straining to open your bowels stretches the pelvic floor muscles, making them weaker. It is important to drink plenty of fluids and you may need to adjust your diet. This is particularly important if you have just had prostate surgery.

3. Drink enough fluids

Reduce your caffeine intake, as these drinks may irritate your bladder. Try to drink more water and aim to drink between 3 - 4 pints (1.5 - 2 litres) of fluid a day. Do not restrict your fluid intake. This can make your symptoms worse as your urine will be more concentrated. Regular drinking at the same times each day is best.

4. Exercises to avoid if you think your pelvic floor is weak

- double leg lifts
- straight leg sit-ups
- repetitive heavy lifting
- high impact exercise such as jumping and running.

These activities put increased stress and pressure on the pelvic floor muscles.

5. Movement changes

Try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing and laughing. This will help to prevent leakage.

Bladder emptying

It is important to empty your bladder completely each time you go to the toilet. Take your time. If you think your bladder may not be completely empty try rocking your pelvis forwards and backwards; it may help to empty it a little more.