

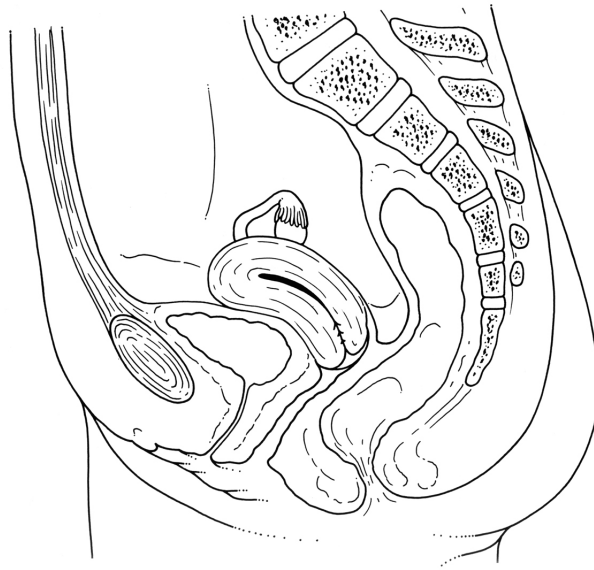
Female pelvic floor exercises

Information and advice for patients

Continence

What are pelvic floor exercises?

Pelvic floor exercises are exercises for the pelvic floor muscles. The pelvic floor muscles are attached to the bottom of your spine (coccyx) and the bone between your legs (pubic bone). They support your bladder, uterus (womb) and bowel and help to control when you pass urine (wee) and faeces (poo).



The pelvic floor muscles should be firm and strong to keep the urine and faeces inside. If the muscles have become weakened they may cause you to accidentally leak urine or faeces. The muscles can be weakened by childbirth, abdominal surgery, the menopause, being overweight, straining to open your bowels or having a persistent cough.

What are the benefits of performing pelvic floor exercises?

Pelvic floor exercises can increase the strength and tone of your pelvic floor muscles to help you gain better control passing urine and faeces and improve stress incontinence (leaking urine when you cough, sneeze or lift). The improvement you get from the exercises will depend on how much effort you put in and how often you perform them.

If you are pregnant, performing pelvic floor exercises can reduce your risk of developing incontinence after giving birth.

What are the risks of pelvic floor exercises?

If you do not use the right muscles when performing the exercises you may not experience any improvement. In addition to this, if you perform the exercises while you are actually passing urine this could lead to problems emptying your bladder, so do not perform them when passing urine.

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What are the risks of not performing pelvic floor exercises?

If you choose not to perform pelvic floor exercises your pelvic floor muscles will not become stronger and you may continue to experience problems controlling when you pass urine and/or faeces.

Are there any alternatives to performing these exercises?

Depending on your condition there may be alternative treatments such as re-training your bladder or inserting a device into your vagina that you need to squeeze with your pelvic floor muscles. However these treatments may only be considered if you have already tried pelvic floor exercises first.

How to perform pelvic floor exercises

1. Choose any comfortable position with your knees slightly apart.
2. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind; slowly squeeze the muscles around your back passage (anus). You should be able to feel the muscle move upward and inward. You should not be using any other muscles - do not pull in your tummy, squeeze your legs together or tighten your buttocks.
3. Bring the feeling forward as if you were trying to stop yourself passing urine.
4. Hold this for 5 – 10 seconds.
5. Let the muscles lower and relax, then rest for 10 seconds.
6. Repeat steps 1 – 5 up to 10 times (you will need to work up to this gradually).
7. Now try to perform a set of quick exercises ('quick flicks') – squeeze the muscles quickly and hold for 1 second before relaxing.
8. Work up to doing 10 quick flicks at any one time.

Build up to doing 10 slow exercises and 10 quick flicks at least once a day.

Whenever you do anything that might cause you to leak urine you should quickly tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold them tight to prevent leakage.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns about performing these exercises or problems with continence please speak to your GP, continence nurse, continence physiotherapist or midwife.

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

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Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Hanzaree and Steggall, 'Treatment of patients with urge or stress urinary incontinence', September 2010
- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, CG40 'Urinary incontinence: The management of urinary incontinence in women', October 2006
- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, CG49 'Faecal incontinence: The management of faecal incontinence in adults', June 2007
- Joanna Briggs Institute, 'A pelvic floor muscle exercise programme for urinary incontinence following childbirth', 2006

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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