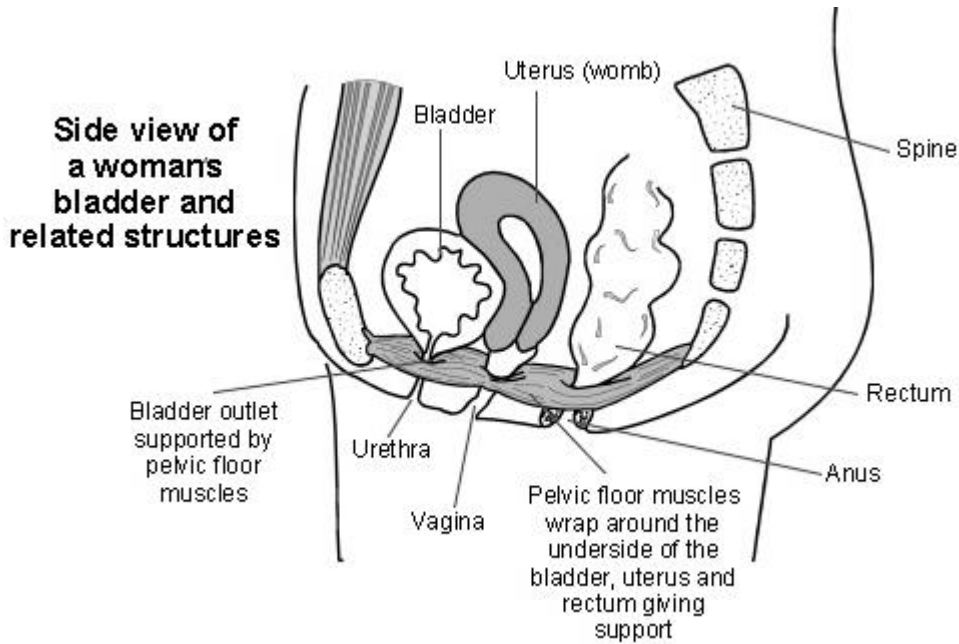


Urinary Incontinence

Pelvic Floor Muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are a 'hammock' of muscles underneath your pelvis. They attached at the front of the pelvis to the pubic bone and span backwards to attach at the base of the spine around the sacrum and coccyx (tailbone). The opening of the bladder, birth canal (vagina) and the bowel all pass through the pelvic floor.



What does the pelvic floor do?

1. The pelvic floor muscles are continually working to help support your pelvic organs and abdominal content (bladder, uterus in women and bowel) from underneath and stop them dropping down.
2. The pelvic floor muscles help with bladder and bowel control. The pelvic floor muscles circle around the opening for the urethra, vagina and back passage and stop you leaking urine, wind or faeces. The muscles need to work harder when you cough or sneeze or on exertion to avoid leaking.
3. The pelvic floor muscles have an important sexual function, helping to increased sexual awareness for you and your partner during sexual intercourse.

Common disorders of the pelvic floor include urinary incontinence (leaking) or prolapse of the vaginal walls or the uterus. Like other muscles in the body, 'if you don't use them, you lose them'. They weaken and are no longer efficient at doing their job. The pelvic floor muscles are affected and can weaken for a variety of reasons:

- Childbirth
- Pelvic surgery
- The natural aging process
- Hormonal changes for example the menopause
- Obesity
- Chronic constipation
- Repetitive heavy lifting
 - Smoking
 - Medical conditions such as diabetes, multiple sclerosis and stroke
 - Repetitive urine infections
 - Chronic cough, chest infection and conditions such as asthma and COPD
 - Hypermobility



Urinary Function

The average number of episodes of bladder emptying (voids) a day is 6-8 with a 2-3 hours between each void. This will depend on fluid intake. Normal fluid intake is about 1.5-2 litres a day. Nocturia describes the number of times you need to empty the bladder at night; this can vary from anything from 0-3 times, this can depend on factors such as age.

Urinary Incontinence

Urinary incontinence can occur after having a baby or for other reasons throughout life. Doing pelvic floor muscle exercises may help to prevent this.

Types of Urinary Incontinence:

-Stress Urinary Incontinence

You may find you leak urine or wind when you cough, sneeze, laugh, run or jump. This is called stress incontinence. When you do any of these activities there is an increase in pressure in the abdomen which pushes down against the bladder and pelvic floor. The pelvic floor muscles can help by contracting to squeeze the urethra shut.

-Urge Urinary Incontinence

Urgency is the sudden desire to go to the toilet immediately and if you leak as you rush to the toilet you may have urge incontinence. Sometimes the leakage occurs with little or no warning. There are several reasons why this may happen. It may be because you have fallen into bad bladder habits. It may also be due to an irritation inside your bladder, from caffeine or alcohol or a urine infection, or because you have lost control of your bladder muscles, after childbirth.

-Mixed Incontinence

This is a combination of both stress and urge incontinence.

Treatment

Pelvic Floor Exercises

A pelvic floor muscle contraction is performed by closing and drawing up your front and back passage. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift'. In the beginning it may be easier to do the exercises in lying, but you can progress them to sitting and standing.

There are two types of exercises you should do;

1. Quick and strong

Squeeze as hard as you can and then relax. Rest a second and then repeat up to 10 times.

2. Endurance

Squeeze and hold for up to 10 seconds. You must feel the muscle relax after each contraction. Aim to repeat it as many times as you can, building up to a maximum of 10 times.

- DO NOT** Pull in your stomach excessively
- DO NOT** Squeeze your legs together
- DO NOT** Tighten your buttocks
- DO NOT** Hold your breath.

You must aim to do these exercises at **least 3 times a day**. Generally, it takes 3-6 months to get a muscle really strong again. Do not do so many that the muscle begins to ache, remember it is quality not quantity!

Tips

- Always tightened your pelvic floor muscles before you lift, cough or sneeze etc.
- To relieve the load on your pelvic floor, try and maintain an optimal weight for your height and build.
- Try to avoid constipation by eating sufficient dietary fibre and ensuring adequate fluid intake.
- Drink at least 1.5 litres a day, ideally water.
- Try to avoid food and drinks that irritate the bladder for example coffee, tea, hot chocolate, green tea, cola, citrus fruit and juices (e.g. orange, lemon, grapefruit, lime and tangerine), tomatoes, blackcurrant juice, alcohol.
- Drinks that **do not** irritated the bladder include water, milk, caffeine free tea, herbal teas, milk shakes, diluted fruit juice/squash
- Do not get into the habit of going to the toilet 'just in case'. Emptying your bladder too frequently may reduce its capacity. Aim to go every 2-3 hours. If you feel you need to go more than every 2 hours, then try and train your bladder to wait longer. When you feel the urge, try to delay using the following techniques:
 - Stand still or sit down
 - Stay calm – do not panic
 - Contract your pelvic floor
 - Sit on something hard, like an arm of a chair or rolled up towel.
 - Distract yourself
 - Wiggle you toes, go up and down on your toes, the nerve that supplies these are the same as your bladder and may help.
 - Wait until the urgency has passed (~30-60 secs)– do not rush to the toilet mid urge

