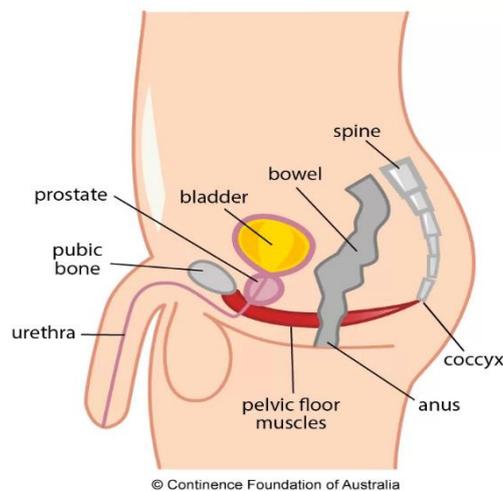


Male Pelvic Floor Muscles

The pelvic floor is a sheet of muscles and connective tissue (fascia) that forms the floor of the pelvis. They attach 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). Sphincters/ valves at the base of the bladder and underneath the prostate gland help to prevent urine leakage. The anal sphincter at the base of the back passage maintains bowel control. The pelvic floor muscles wrap around these valves to assist them in staying closed.



What does the pelvic floor do?

1. The pelvic floor muscles help with bladder and bowel control. These muscles help to keep the bladder and bowel openings closed to prevent leakage of urine, faeces or wind. They also relax to allow the passage of urine and faeces out of the body.
2. The pelvic floor muscles have an important sexual function. Good pelvic floor muscles help to maintain an erection, and may prevent premature ejaculation.

Common disorders of the pelvic floor include incontinence and/ or erectile dysfunction and can affect men of all ages. The pelvic floor muscles may become weak or dysfunctional due to damage to the nerve supply or the supporting muscles being stretched or damaged.

This may happen for a variety of reasons:

- Prostate surgery, for example a prostatectomy or TURP (transurethral resection of prostate)
- Pelvic radiation therapy may have similar effects
- Poor physical fitness due to a lack of regular exercise
- Being overweight
- Chronic constipation
- Prolonged heavy lifting
- Chronic cough
- Certain conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS), stroke and diabetes
- Injury to the perineum (the area from the base of the penis to the back passage) by a direct blow or prolonged pressure e.g. cycling for long periods.

Symptoms of a weak pelvic floor may include:

- **Stress Urinary Incontinence** - You may find you leak urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh or exercise.
- **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 urinary 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 influenced by caffeine or alcohol or a urine infection.
- **Mixed Incontinence** -This is a combination of both stress and urge urinary incontinence.
- **Post-micturition dribble** - leakage of a few drops of urine after you have finished passing urine.
- **Bowel/anal incontinence** - accidental leakage from the bowel of faeces, or difficulty in controlling wind. (See bowel function handout for more detail).
- **Erectile dysfunction** - not being able to gain or maintain an erection.

- **Premature ejaculation** - ejaculation during sexual activity sooner than you/ your partner would like.

How to do Pelvic Floor Exercises

Squeeze and lift from the front by either imagining you are trying to stop yourself from passing urine, or trying to shorten/draw your penis up and inwards. Now try lifting the muscles from the back as if stopping the escape of wind. When you feel you have the hang

of it, try lifting the front and back together. 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 to make them become more challenging and functional.

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!

To check that your pelvic floor muscles are working correctly:

- Place your fingers on your perineum. You should feel the perineum lift upwards as you contract your muscles.

- Stand in front of a mirror; when you do a pelvic floor muscle contraction you should see the base of your penis draw inwards and your testicles/ scrotum lift slightly.

Tips:

- ✓ Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you do anything that may put them under pressure such as lifting, coughing or sneezing.
- ✓ After urinating tighten your pelvic floor muscles strongly to empty the last drops of urine out. This may help to stop post-micturition dribble.
- ✓ If you are sexually active, tighten your pelvic floor muscles during intercourse to maintain the quality of your erection.

- ✓ Being overweight puts extra strain on your pelvic floor muscles. Your symptoms may improve if you lose weight.
- ✓ Avoid constipation: straining to empty your bowels may also weaken your pelvic floor muscles.
- ✓ If you ride a bicycle for long periods, make sure that you raise yourself off the seat at regular intervals to take the pressure off your perineum. Consider wearing padded shorts. Special saddles have been designed to help avoid this problem.