

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES FOR WOMEN

The pelvic floor muscles form a sling between the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis, and the coccyx (tail bone) at the back. This sling of muscle supports the abdominal contents and helps control the passage of urine from the bladder and faeces from the bowel.

- **You can improve control of your bladder and bowel by doing exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.**
- **Good results take time.** In order to build up your pelvic floor muscles to their maximum strength you will need to work hard at these exercises. You may not notice an improvement for several weeks and may not reach your maximum performance for a few months.
- **Finding your pelvic floor muscles**
Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind by tightening around the anal sphincter strongly and then, still holding onto that contraction tighten around the bladder and vagina as if trying to prevent a flow of urine. If you are doing this correctly you should feel a 'squeeze and lift' internally.
Find out how many seconds you can hold this contraction before you tire (**up to a maximum of 10 seconds**) and how many repetitions (**up to a maximum of 10 reps**) **x3 per day**.
- Do not hold your breath, tighten your buttocks or hold your inner thighs when doing your pelvic floor exercises!

Try these exercises progressing from;

Lying down with knees bent

to

Sitting with knees slightly apart

and eventually to

Standing with feet apart

As well as slow contractions, try some fast 1 second contractions also up to a **maximum of 10 reps x3 per day**.

Try also as often as you can to remember to contract your pelvic floor muscles up to 30% of a maximal contraction when walking around during the day.

Once you have mastered pulling up your pelvic floor try contracting the deep horizontal abdominal muscles by pulling in your navel towards your spine at the same time.

It may be helpful to use the exercise diary below to chart your progress;

1. Hold the contraction as strongly as you can ("*maximal contraction*") *without* tightening your buttocks, inner thighs or holding your breath.
 2. Perform ____ maximal contractions, holding for ____ seconds, with a ____ second rest between each contraction ____ times daily.
 3. Perform one set of ____ fast contractions of the pelvic floor muscles ____ daily.
- Remember that ***Quality is better than Quantity!*** Fewer good exercises will be more beneficial than many half-hearted ones.
 - Also, tighten your pelvic floor muscles strongly when you bend forward to get up from a chair, when sneezing, coughing or lifting, or whenever you do heavy work such as gardening or during sport. Some women find that by tightening before they undertake such activities they assist themselves in regaining bladder and bowel control.

The future. Once the muscles are strong and your symptoms have diminished continue to do **10 slow contractions holding for 10 seconds and 10 fast contractions in standing once a day for life.**

Try to avoid weakening these muscles further by not becoming constipated or putting on any extra weight.