

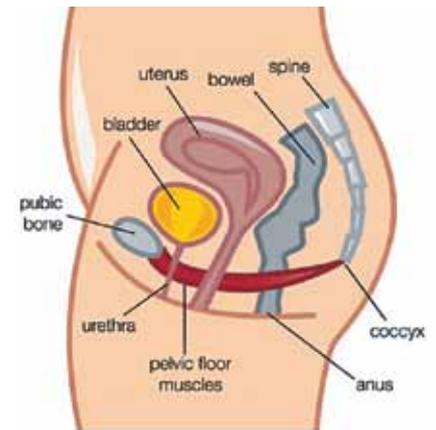
Patient information factsheet

Pelvic floor muscle exercise sheet

This factsheet will help you to exercise and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. These muscles form a sling from the front to the back of the pelvis and provide support to the organs within it. They also play a role in controlling your bladder, bowel and sexual functions.

The basic exercise

Sit comfortably with your knees slightly apart and imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing urine or wind. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift' or a drawing together of the front and back passages. You should be able to feel the muscle move (a movement pulling away from your chair). Your legs and buttocks should not move and you should not hold your breath.



There are two variations of this basic exercise that you need to do to strengthen and improve the function of your pelvic floor muscles: slow and fast contractions.

Slow contractions

While sitting comfortably, tighten your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can. Count to see how long you can hold this position for before the muscle starts to relax. Aim for a count of ten if possible.

How many seconds can you hold this position for?

Relax for a few seconds and then repeat this exercise as many times as you can (up to ten times).

How many times can you repeat this exercise?

Fast contractions

Sit comfortably with your knees slightly apart. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as quickly as you can and let go straight away.

Count how many fast contractions you can do in a row before your muscles become too tired to continue.

How many fast contractions can you do?

Your exercise prescription

Each time you exercise you should perform:

slow contractions each one held for seconds (with a similar rest between each one).

Then you should perform fast contractions.

This exercise regime should be practised **three times each day**.

The knack technique

Tighten your pelvic floor muscle before and during these activities:

- coughing
- sneezing
- laughing
- picking something up

This is known as the 'knack technique' and can be used to reduce strain on your pelvic floor muscles and prevent leakage of urine.

Other things that may help

- Maintain your optimum weight
- Avoid constipation
- Avoid heavy lifting
- Reduce your caffeine intake

How long will it take for the muscles to improve?

If you do your exercises regularly you should see some improvement in three to six months. Some people may notice an improvement after six weeks.

Remember, pelvic floor muscle exercises are for life and your symptoms may return if you stop doing them. Training should become part of your daily routine.

Further information or advice

If you require any further information or advice during your pregnancy, or within the first ten days following delivery, please contact the physiotherapy department. If your maternity care was provided by University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust you can refer yourself to us.

Women's health physiotherapy team
Level G
Princess Anne Hospital
Coxford Road
Southampton
SO16 5YA
Tel: **023 8120 8967**

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.