

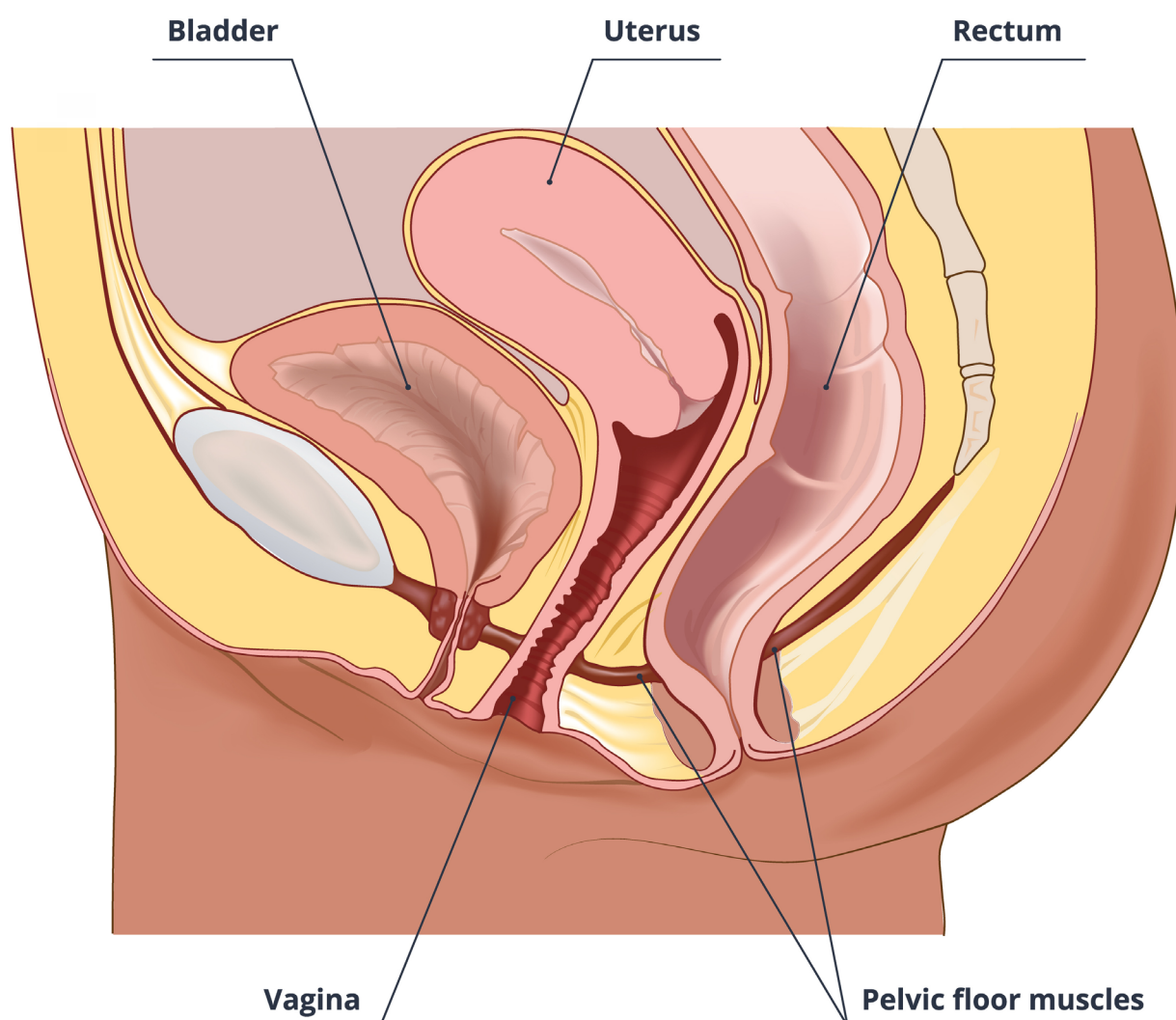
Patient information factsheet

Pelvic floor muscle exercise sheet

We have given you this factsheet to help you exercise and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. It explains what pelvic floor muscles are and provides you with exercises and advice. We hope it helps to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

What are pelvic floor muscles?

Pelvic floor muscles form a sling from the front to the back of your 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

Start the exercise by sitting in a comfortable and relaxed position in a chair. Squeeze and lift your back passage as if you are stopping yourself from passing wind. You should be able to feel your pelvic floor muscles move and lift away from the chair. Your legs and bottom muscles should not move and you should try not to hold your breath.

After each squeeze, let your muscles fully relax before squeezing again.

There are two variations of the basic exercise to help strengthen and improve the function of your pelvic floor muscles; long and short contractions.

Long contractions

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can. Count to see how long you can hold this position for before your muscles start to relax. Make sure you continue to breathe normally during this exercise.

How many seconds can you hold this position for? _____

Relax for a few seconds and repeat this exercise as many times as you can (up to a maximum of 10 repetitions).

How many times can you repeat this exercise? _____

Build up the time you can hold this position for and the number of repetitions. Try to aim for a 10 second hold and to be able to repeat this 10 times.

Short contractions

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as quickly as you can and then let go straight away. Count how many short contractions you can do in a row before your muscles become tired (up to a maximum of 10 repetitions). Always let your muscles fully relax before the next repetition.

How many short contractions can you do? _____

Try to build up the number of repetitions you can do. You should aim for 10 short ones.

Your exercise prescription

This is based on your assessment above. Each time you do a set of pelvic floor exercises you should perform:

Long contractions

Hold for _____ seconds. Repeat _____ times.

Short contractions

Repeat _____ times.

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

Patient information factsheet

You should work the muscles until they get tired. You may find it easier to practise your exercises lying down or in a sitting position. When you get used to doing pelvic floor exercises, you can try to work your pelvic floor muscles when in a standing position or when carrying out other activities, such as brushing your teeth or making a drink.

It is easy to forget to do your exercises, especially when you start to improve. To help you remember to do the exercises, you may find it useful to download the NHS Squeezy app to help. You can enter your exercise plan and set reminders on the app. For more information, please visit: www.squeezyapp.com

The knack technique

The knack technique is when you tighten your pelvic floor muscles before and during certain activities to reduce strain on your pelvic floor muscles and prevent leakage of urine. You should use this technique when you:

- cough
- sneeze
- laugh
- pick something up

Other ways to support your pelvic floor muscles

There are many other ways you can help support your pelvic floor muscles, including:

- maintaining a healthy body weight for your height (to work out what this is, please visit www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator)
- eating a healthy diet and drinking lots of water to avoid constipation
- sitting correctly on the toilet (for more information about this, please read our 'Bulge and brace technique' factsheet, which can be found on: www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-patients/patient-information-leaflets)
- avoiding heavy lifting
- reducing the amount of caffeine and fizzy drinks in your diet
- quitting smoking

How long will it take for the muscles to improve?

You need to build up the exercises gradually over a period of weeks. 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.

You should exercise your pelvic floor muscles every day for life. Training should become part of your daily routine, even if you do not have any pelvic floor symptoms.

Further information or advice

If your maternity care is provided by University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust and you are currently pregnant, or if it has been less than six-weeks since your baby's birth, you may be able to self-refer to our women's health physiotherapy services. Please contact the physiotherapy department for more information.

Patient information factsheet

Contact us

For any further questions or concerns, please contact us.

Women's health physiotherapy team

Telephone: **023 8120 8829** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm)

Useful links

www.squeezyapp.com

www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/womens-health/what-are-pelvic-floor-exercises

www.thepogp.co.uk/patient_information/default.aspx

www.thepogp.co.uk/patients/pelvic_health_advice/pelvic_floor_muscles.aspx

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

Join our family of charity supporters with a monthly donation! It's a wonderful way to show your ongoing support of our patients and staff.

Scan the QR code or visit southamptonshospitalscharity.org/donate



**Southampton
Hospitals
Charity**

Charity Registration Numbers 1051543

