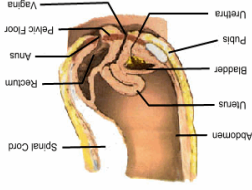


This leaflet provides information and advice about strengthening your pelvic floor muscles. These muscles form a platform from the pubic bone at the front, to the bottom of the spine at the back and, as the name suggests, form the floor to the pelvis.



The functions of the pelvic floor muscles are:

- To support the pelvic organs (bladder, uterus and rectum);
- To control continence of urine, faeces and wind from the bladder and bowels AND give tone to the vaginal opening;
- Maintain intra-abdominal pressure.

Why exercise the pelvic floor muscles?

Incontinence is the involuntary loss of urine. It affects one in every four women and can be avoided by regularly exercising the pelvic floor muscles. During pregnancy the weight of the baby puts added strain on the pelvic floor muscles and they are stretched during childbirth.

Weakened pelvic floor muscles can cause urine to leak during activity such as coughing, sneezing, laughing or running. Some women also suffer from bowel incontinence and have difficulty controlling wind or motions.

Regularly exercising the pelvic floor muscles during pregnancy and after childbirth helps to strengthen them, prevent incontinence, reduce the incidence of a prolapsed uterus and enhances intimate sensation and sexual satisfaction.

The basic exercise

Pelvic floor muscles need to be exercised just like any other muscle. This programme will help to maintain or improve their strength during and after pregnancy. We recommend that you begin these exercises in pregnancy and start them as soon as you can after childbirth, even if you have a caesarean section.

Pelvic floor contraction:

Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time, trying to stop your flow of urine mid stream. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing up the front and back passages.

It is important that you do this without pulling in your tummy, squeezing your legs together, tightening your buttocks or holding your breath. In other words, only the pelvic floor muscles should be working. This is a secret exercise that nobody can see you performing.

DO PRACTISE EXERCISES IN ALL POSITIONS

DO NOT PRACTISE THESE EXERCISES WHIST PASSING URINE.

The exercise programme

Please read through the programme before starting the exercises as first you should determine your starting point

Your exercise programme should consist of long slow squeezes and short fast squeezes.

Long slow squeezes

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as described above and hold the contraction for as many seconds as you can (to a maximum of 10 seconds). **How long can you hold the contraction? ...seconds.**

Release the contraction and rest for four seconds.

Repeat the contraction, hold and release as many times as you can (to a maximum of 10 repetitions). **How many times can you repeat the contraction ...times**

These times become your starting point. E.g. ...2...seconds ...4.....times

Repeat these exercises as many times as you can—every hour if you can manage it. These exercises will make your pelvic floor stronger and the length and strength of your contractions will soon increase.

These exercises build up the muscles endurance and they will soon be able to work harder for longer.

Short fast squeezes

It is also important that the pelvic floor muscles are able to react quickly when you cough or sneeze. **How many quick contractions can you do? ...**

You should aim to increase this number (up to a maximum of 10 in any one spell).

The hardest part is remembering to do the exercises. Here are some tips to help trigger your memory:

- Every time your baby feeds, you wash up and have a drink;
- Put stickers in places that will catch your eye (phone, fridge, kettle);
- Exercise after you have emptied your bladder;
- Set an alarm on your mobile phone.
- Wear your watch on the wrong wrist;

Pelvic Floor exercises are for life—a lesson well learned but needs continual practise to maintain strength and tone!

A Test

Once you have had your baby, you can test the control of the muscles with the following exercise:

Ensure that your bladder is nearly full (about three hours since you last emptied it), stand with your feet apart and jump up and down on the spot and cough deeply twice.

It may take three to six months to get good results but persevere, it will be worth it.

Once your pelvic floor muscles are strong, it is important that you maintain them so continue with these exercises two to three times a day for life.

If you experience any problems during or after your pregnancy please speak to your midwife or doctor who may refer you to an obstetric and gynaecology physiotherapist or continence advisor.

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Exercising the Pelvic Floor Muscles



Pelvic floor muscles and how to strengthen them through exercise.

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