

What can you do to strengthen your pelvic floor?

A weak pelvic floor cannot do its job properly. Research has shown that the pelvic floor responds to regular exercise. In fact, the sooner you start pelvic floor exercises, the better your chance of preventing or overcoming many of the problems associated with a weak pelvic floor.

If you experience stress incontinence, contracting the pelvic floor before any activity (for example, coughing, sneezing, lifting or jumping) that will increase pressure to the pelvic floor can help to protect you against leakage. Practise this technique regularly to ensure that it becomes a lifelong habit.

What are good bladder and bowel habits?

Going to the toilet between four and six times a day and no more than twice at night is normal.

Some simple steps to keep your bladder and bowel healthy are:

- Try to drink at least six to eight cups (one and a half litres) of fluid a day (unless advised otherwise by your doctor).
- Limit the amount of caffeine (for example, coffee, cola and tea) and alcohol you drink as these drinks irritate the bladder.
- Try to go to the toilet only when your bladder is full and you need to go (emptying your bladder before going to bed is fine).
- Take your time when urinating so that your bladder can empty completely.
- Keep your bowels regular and avoid constipation.
- Do not strain when using your bowels.
- Keep your pelvic floor muscles in good condition.

How to do pelvic floor exercises

How to tighten your pelvic floor muscles

- Sit or lie comfortably with the muscles of your thighs, buttocks and abdomen relaxed.
- Tighten (and then relax) the ring of muscles around your back passage (anus) as if you are trying to control diarrhoea or wind. Practise this movement until you are able to exercise the correct muscles.
- When you are passing urine, try to stop the flow midstream and then re-start it. This should only

be performed occasionally, as this action may interfere with your normal bladder emptying.

How to do your pelvic floor routine

- **For men:** tighten and draw in strongly the muscles around your rectum (back passage) and urethra (urine tube) all at once, trying to hold them up inside. Hold this contraction as you count to five and then relax. You should have a feeling of letting go as you relax. Rest for at least 10 seconds and repeat. Aim to do 10 contractions.
- **For women:** tighten and draw in gently the muscles around your rectum (back passage), vagina and urethra all at once, trying to hold them up inside. Hold this contraction as you count to five and then relax. You should have a feeling of letting go as you relax. Rest for at least 10 seconds and repeat. Aim to do 10 contractions.
- When doing these exercises:
 - Do not hold your breath.
 - Do not push down; squeeze and lift up.
 - Do not tighten your buttocks or thighs.

What else do you need to know?

- Strengthening the pelvic floor muscles takes time. If you have very weak muscles initially, they will fatigue easily. Don't give up. These exercises do work if done regularly.
- These exercises should be done regularly and you can add them into your daily routine, such as after going to the toilet, when having a drink or when lying in bed.
- A position that enhances pelvic floor function should be chosen if you regularly perform airway clearance techniques. When sitting, this is achieved with feet flat on the floor, your hips at 90 degrees and your lumbar spine in neutral or straight (not slumped). Ensure you contract the pelvic floor muscles before huffing and coughing.
- For more information, please contact your doctor, physiotherapist or continence advisor, or contact the National Continence Helpline (phone: 1800 330 066). There are specialist health care professionals that deal with the problem of incontinence.