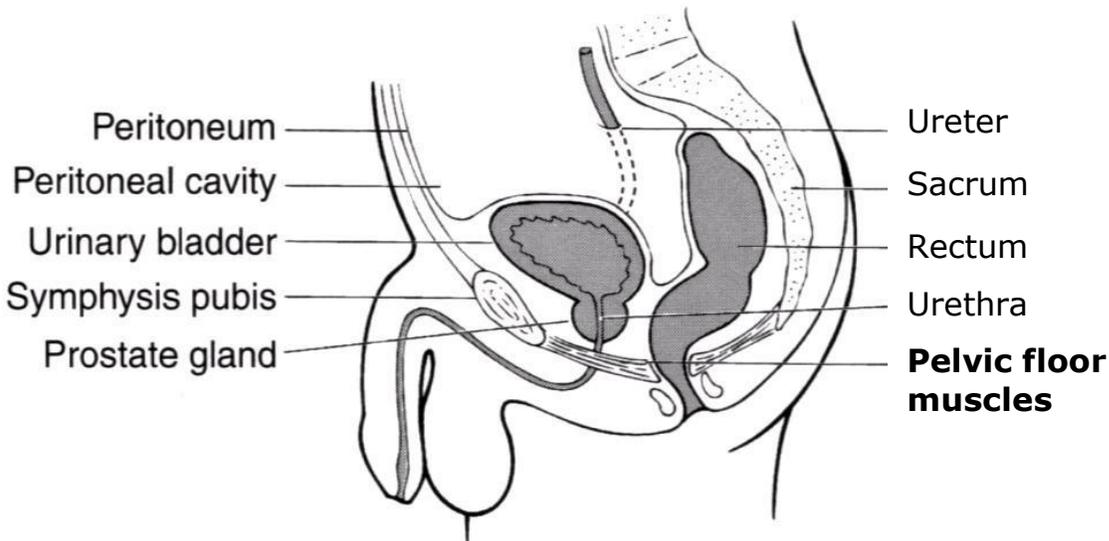


## What is the Pelvic Floor?

The pelvic floor is made up of layers of muscle and other tissues stretching like a hammock across the floor of the pelvis. It is attached to your tail bone (coccyx) at the back and to the pubic bone in front.

The urethra (bladder outlet) and the rectum (back passage) pass through the pelvic floor. The hammock of muscles and other tissues supports the bladder and the bowel and plays an important role in bladder and bowel control.



## How do the Pelvic Floor Muscles become Weak?

The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened by:

- Some operations e.g. radical prostatectomy for prostate cancer
- A chronic cough, such as smoker's cough, chronic bronchitis or asthma
- Being overweight
- Continual straining to empty your bowels, usually due to constipation

Although there is no research evidence, it is thought by many that lack of general fitness and persistent heavy lifting tend to result in weakening of the pelvic floor.

Neurological damage (e.g. after a stroke or spinal injury, or resulting from

multiple sclerosis) can also cause weakness of the pelvic floor muscles.

## **Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises**

You can improve control of your bladder and bowel by doing exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. These exercises may also be useful in conjunction with a bladder retraining program aimed at improving bladder control in people who experience the urgent need to pass urine frequently and may not always "make it to the toilet in time".

### **How to Identify your Pelvic Floor Muscles**

It is essential to identify correctly the muscles that need to be exercised.

1. Sit or lie comfortably with the muscles of your thighs, buttocks and abdomen relaxed.
2. Tighten and draw in the ring of muscle around the back passage as if you are trying to control wind. Alternatively imagine you are trying to shorten or withdraw your penis in towards your body. Then relax. Practice this movement several times until you are sure you are exercising the correct muscle. It is important not to brace the stomach muscles strongly when attempting to tighten the pelvic floor muscles as this may cause increased urinary leakage.
3. Each time that you tighten your pelvic floor muscles you may feel the base of your penis move up slightly towards your abdomen and a lifting of your testicles.

It is easy to use the wrong muscles instead of the pelvic floor muscles. Try not to:

- Clench your buttocks
- Squeeze your legs together
- Hold your breath
- Bear down
- Squeeze too hard as other muscles may join in. However, you may feel some tightening around your lower abdomen – this is normal

## Doing Your Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

**Your exercise Programme: 3 times daily**

### Long squeezes

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold them for as long as you can, aim to hold up to a maximum of 10 seconds
- Relax fully for 4 seconds
- Now tighten again for the same time
- Relax fully for 4 seconds
- Repeat this until the muscles feel weaker

How many seconds can you hold for?

How many times could you repeat it?  times

Eventually aim for a 10 second hold repeated 10 times.

### Short squeezes

- Quickly tighten up your pelvic floor muscles
- Relax fully
- Repeat this until the muscles feel weaker

How many times can you do this in a row?

Eventually aim for at least 10 times.

**To strengthen the muscles it is necessary to repeat the long and short squeezes 3 times daily. As your muscles get stronger gradually increase both the hold time in seconds and the number of repetitions. Try to build up to doing 10 long squeeze exercises and 10 short squeezes at least 3 times each day.**

Do your exercises carefully. Quality is more important than quantity - it is important to ensure that you have a good technique and only work the muscles until they get tired.

## **Make the Exercises a Daily Routine**

Once you have learnt how to do these exercises, they should be done regularly; giving each set your full attention. It might be helpful to have regular times during the day for doing the exercises – for example, after going to the toilet, when lying in bed.

**Always tighten your pelvic floor muscles while you are getting up from a chair, coughing, sneezing or lifting (and any other activities that cause leakage). This is called “the knack”; using “the knack” will help you to regain control of your bladder.**

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 will probably not notice an improvement for several weeks and you will not reach your maximum performance for a few months.

When you have recovered control of your bladder or bowel you should continue to tighten your pelvic floor before and during a cough, sneeze or lift.

**Here are some tips to help you remember to do your exercises 3 times a day:**

Either:

1. Use the exercise diary on page 6 of this booklet
2. Set mobile phone reminders or use the NHS Squeezy app for smartphone
3. Or use daily routine activities as a prompt e.g.:
  - Sitting on the toilet lid, after going to the toilet
  - During program breaks on TV
  - If you are a new mum, sitting whilst feeding your baby

## **Other Tips to Help Your Pelvic Floor**

- Avoid constipation and prevent any straining during a bowel movement
- Seek medical advice for hay-fever, asthma or bronchitis to reduce sneezing and coughing. Giving up smoking may reduce coughing
- Keep your weight within the normal range for your height and age
- Share the lifting of heavy loads. Remember to use “the knack” when lifting

## **Useful Information**

**Further information can be found on the pelvic health website found at:**

<https://abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/a-z-of-services/physiotherapy/pelvic-health-physiotherapy/mens-health/>

Search for "Pelvic Health Physiotherapy ABUHB" in your internet browser



Or scan the QR code for quick access via your Smartphone

### Useful Websites and Apps

- [Bladder Health UK](#)
- [Bladder and Bowel Community](#)
- [Prostate Cancer UK](#)
- [CONfidence App](#)
- [Squeezy for men \(squeezyapp.com\)](#)

### Your Exercise Diary

You might like to use the table below (for the first 12 weeks) to remind you to do your exercise 3 times a day. Tick the box each time you do your exercises.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							
Week 5							
Week 6							
Week 7							
Week 8							

Week 9							
Week 10							
Week 11							
Week 12							

Adapted from:

<http://www.continence-foundation.org.uk/symptoms-and-treatments/pelvic-floor-exercises.php>

**“This document is available in Welsh / Mae’r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”**