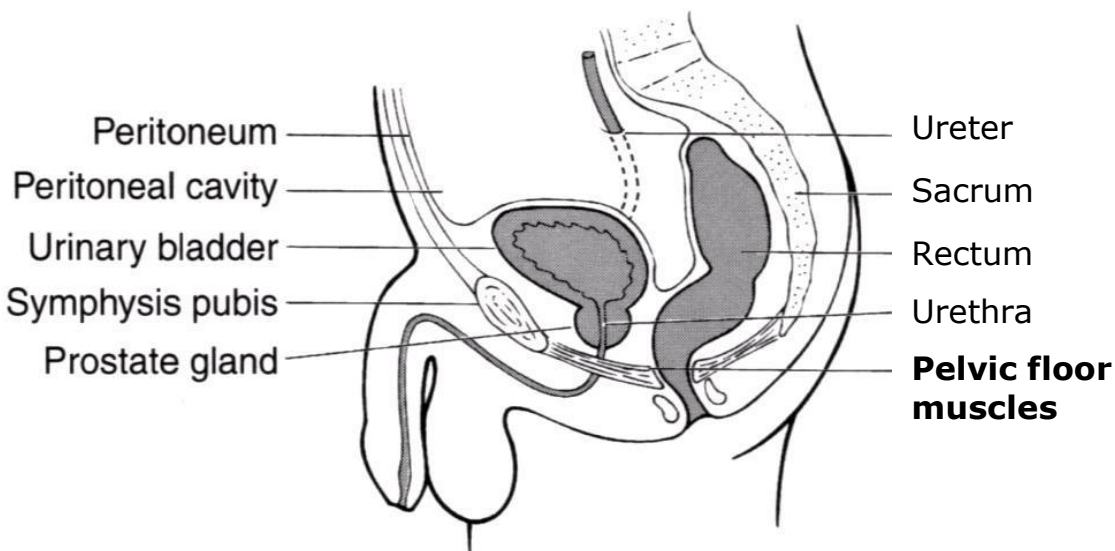


What is the Pelvic Floor?

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. Relax it. 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. The quality is important. Fewer good exercises will be more beneficial than many half-hearted ones.

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.

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

EMG Biofeedback

EMG biofeedback involves measurement of the electrical activity of the pelvic floor, using a small probe (positioned in the back passage) which is connected to a small hand-held machine. This is connected to a computer screen and provides visual feedback about how the muscles are working – and hopefully improving. This can be used with pelvic floor muscle exercises to improve the strength, endurance and function of the pelvic floor, although there has been no clear research to prove its effectiveness in men. EMG biofeedback needs to be used in conjunction with a specialised practitioner, usually a specialist physiotherapist or specialist nurse.

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							

Useful Information

Further information can be found on the pelvic health website found at <https://abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/a-z-hospital-services/physiotherapy/pelvic-health-physiotherapy/>

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

Scan the QR code for quick access via your Smartphone



www.prostatecanceruk.org

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/prostate-cancer

Contact details

If you have any further question please contact:

Coral Seymour, Nurse Specialist – Telephone: 01633 234976

Paulette Hussain, Nurse Specialist – Telephone: 01633 234976

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"