

# Pelvic Health Physiotherapy in Antenatal Care

---



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Contents

---

- **Introduction**
- Effects of pregnancy on the body
- Anatomy and function of the pelvic floor
- Pregnancy and the pelvic floor
- **Bladder & Bowel Function**
- Tips for a healthy bladder
- Tips for healthy bowels
- **Pregnancy Related Pelvic Girdle Pain**
- **Exercise in pregnancy**
- Abdominal exercises to support the pelvis
- Exercise guidelines
- **Useful tips and self-help advice**
- Postural advice
- Perineal massage
- Rest and relaxation

# Effects of Pregnancy on the Body

---

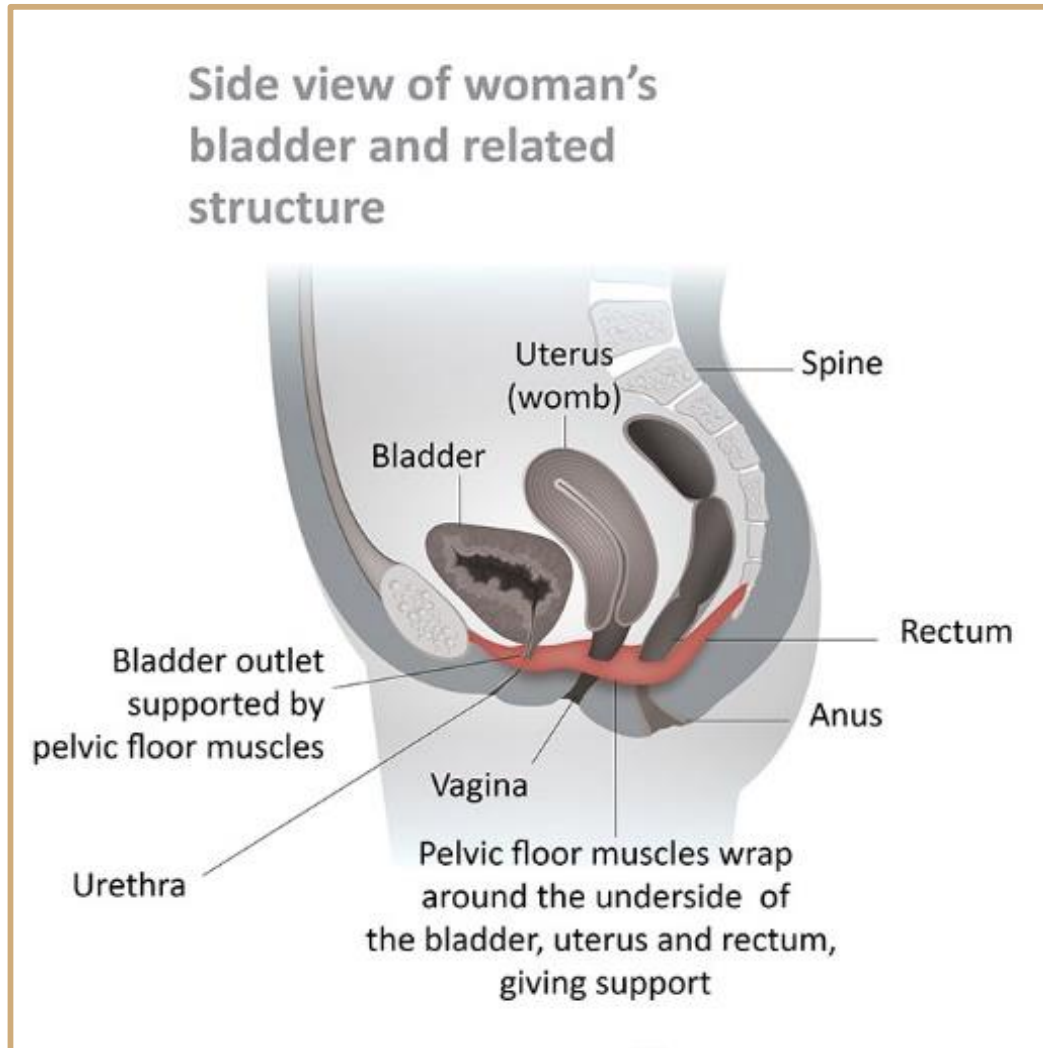
- During pregnancy, your body undergoes many changes. Some of these changes may affect your joints, your posture and the way that you move
- As your baby grows, some muscles will stretch which may cause them to weaken
- Fluctuating hormone levels can affect the joints around your spine, pelvis and hips
- Pregnancy can also impact the way that your bladder and bowels function
- This presentation will address these changes and help you to find ways of managing any subsequent symptoms that you might experience throughout your pregnancy



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

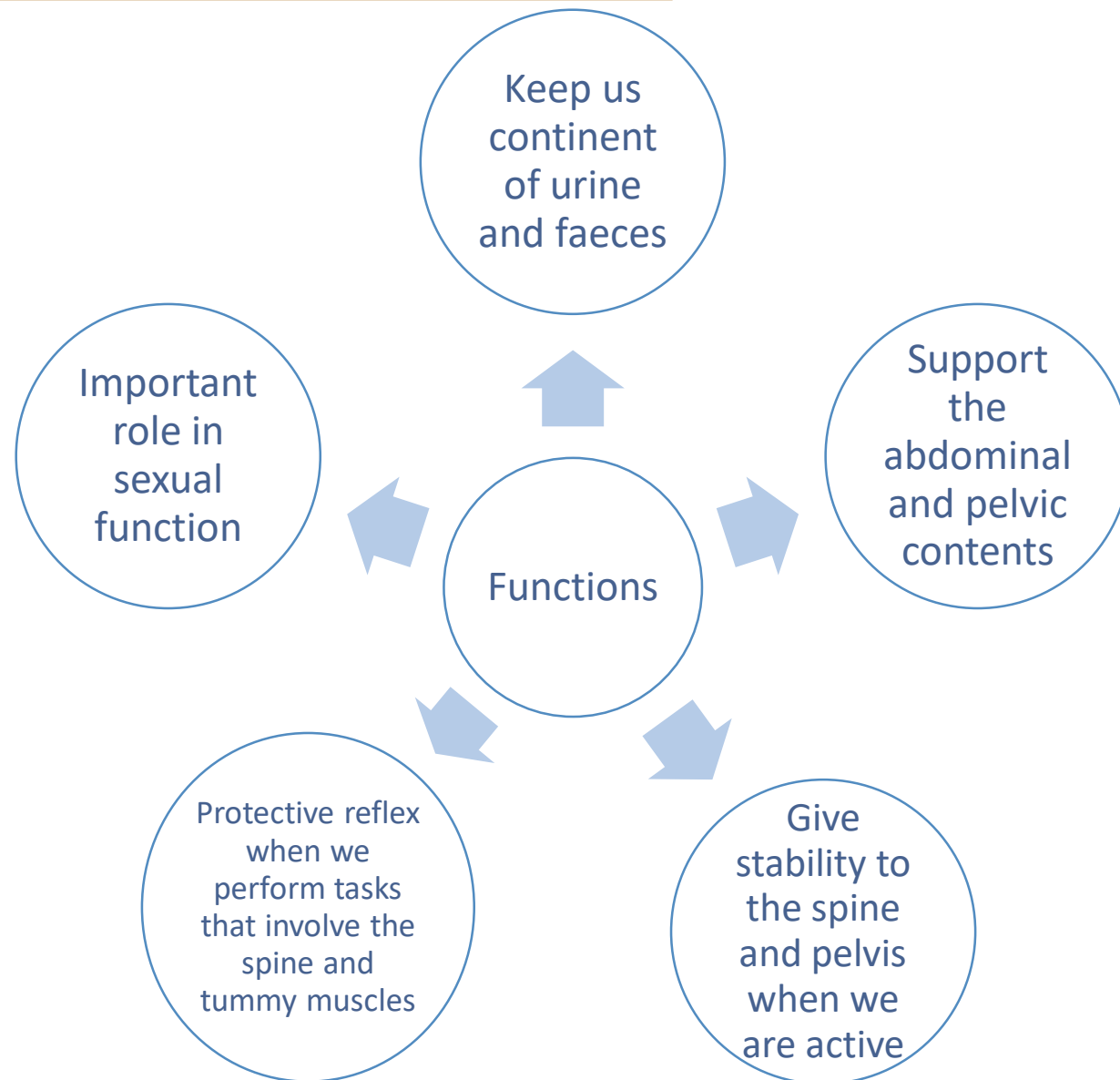
Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# What are the Pelvic Floor Muscles?



- The pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles that span the underside of your pelvis, forming the 'floor' of your pelvis
- They insert into the pubic bone at the front, they fan out to the side into your sitting bones and into your tailbone/coccyx at the back
- Your bladder, reproductive organs and bowels are all supported inside the pelvis by your pelvic floor muscles and other supporting ligaments and connective tissues

# What do the Pelvic Floor Muscles do?



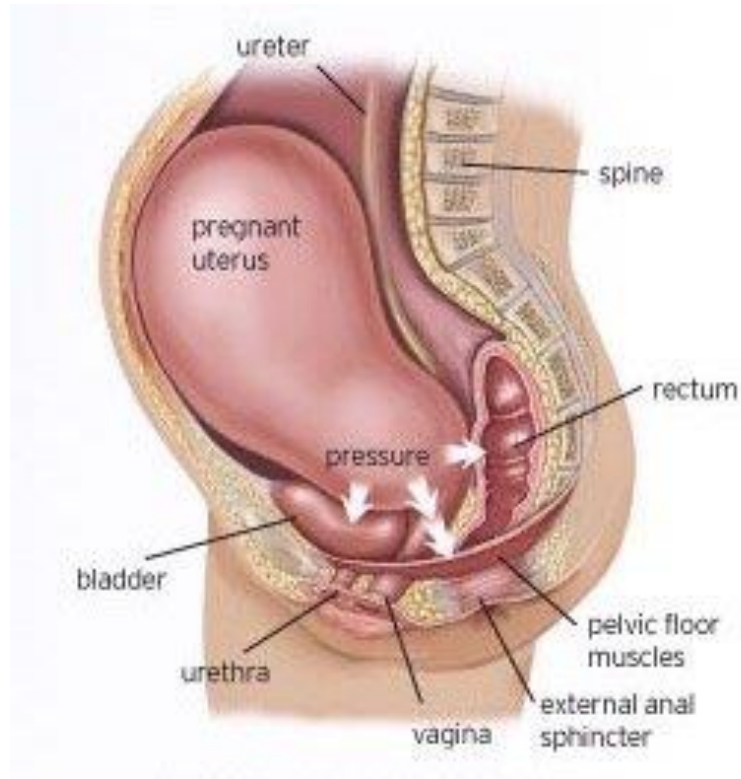
Strong pelvic floor muscles are particularly important in pregnancy to ensure that your pelvis and pelvic contents are well supported and to help keep you continent as your baby grows



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# How does pregnancy affect the pelvic floor?



*Baby and Me Fitness 2020*

Side view of pregnant female pelvis

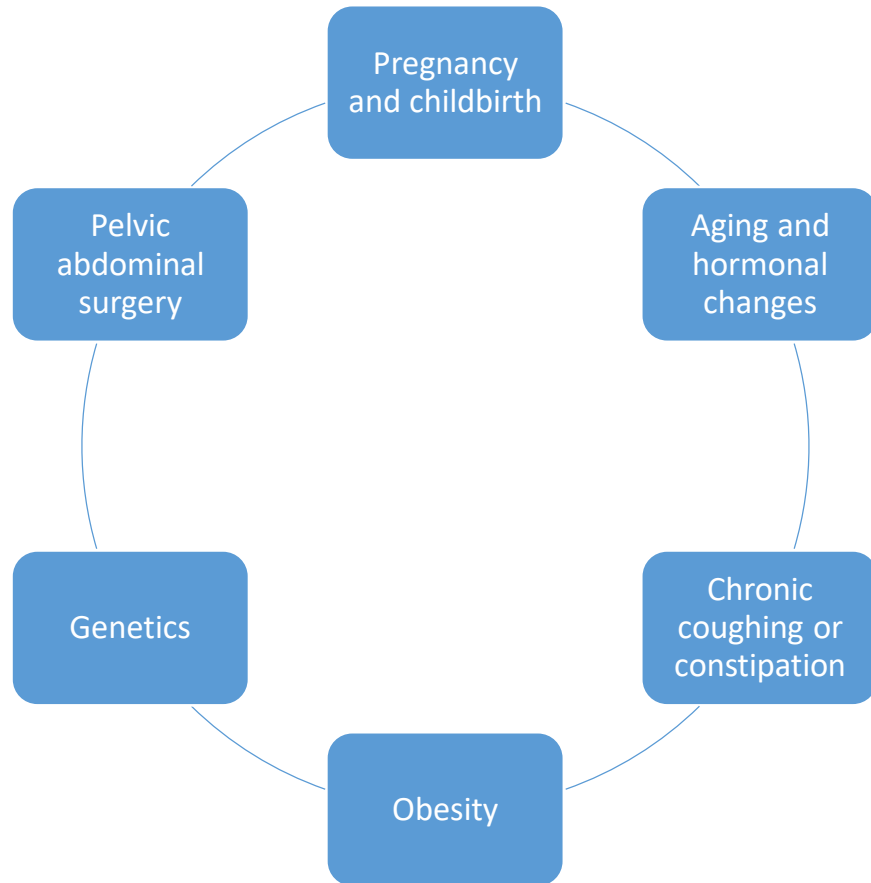
During pregnancy, the pelvic floor muscles have to cope with:

- An increased load as your baby grows bigger and heavier
- Hormonal changes affecting your body throughout pregnancy and the post natal period
- During labour, your pelvic floor muscles must lengthen and stretch in order to allow your baby to be delivered safely via the vaginal canal

These factors can lead to a weakening of the pelvic floor muscles and ligaments

# Other factors that can affect the pelvic floor

---



- Weakness in the pelvic floor muscles and ligaments can sometimes lead to pelvic organ prolapse, urinary and/or faecal urgency and incontinence and decreased sexual sensation
- Weak pelvic floor muscles can be caused by a combination of factors
- Some factors are not changeable, such as aging...
- But many can be changed, such as strengthening weak pelvic floor muscles during and after pregnancy

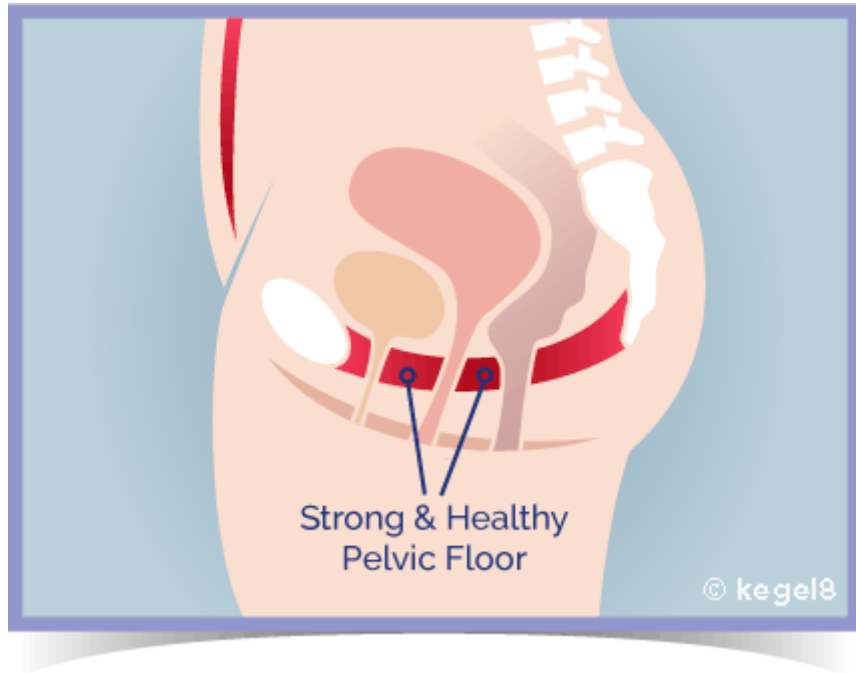


GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Why do Pelvic Floor Exercises during Pregnancy?

---



- To prevent, cure or improve bladder leakage
- To prevent and reduce the risk of developing prolapse symptoms
- To maintain or improve your sexual function
- To ensure your pelvis is strong as your baby grows
- To reduce the likelihood of developing symptoms of pelvic girdle pain



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board



# How to Find & Squeeze your Pelvic Floor Muscles

- ☐ Lie down or sit upright, in a comfortable position  
If you are 19 weeks pregnant or over, ensure that you prop your head and shoulders up on a few pillows
- ☐ Imagine that you are stopping yourself from passing wind and stopping the flow of urine.
- ☐ It should feel like a drawing up of the pelvic floor muscles from the back passage towards the bladder



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# How to Find & Squeeze your Pelvic Floor Muscles

✓ Breathe normally

✓ You may feel your lower tummy muscles 'joining in' a little

✓ Relax your muscles fully after every contraction

✗ Hold your breath

✗ Squeeze your buttock or leg muscles

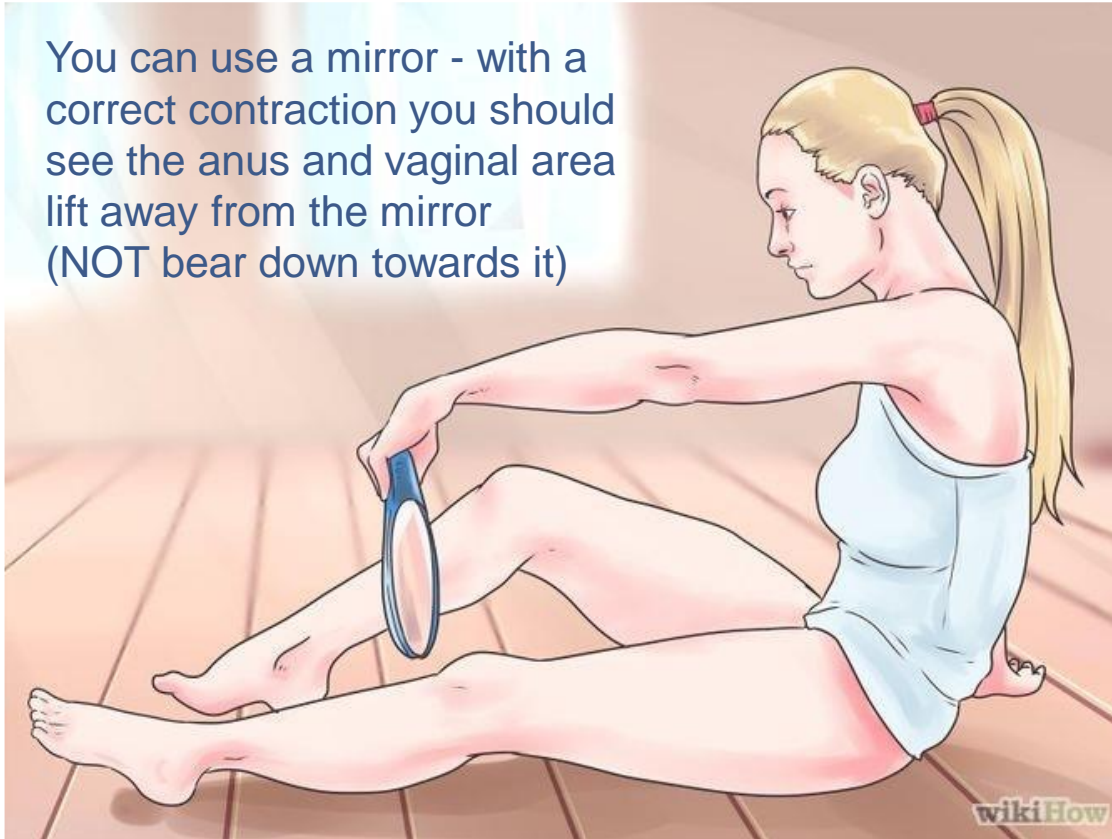


GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

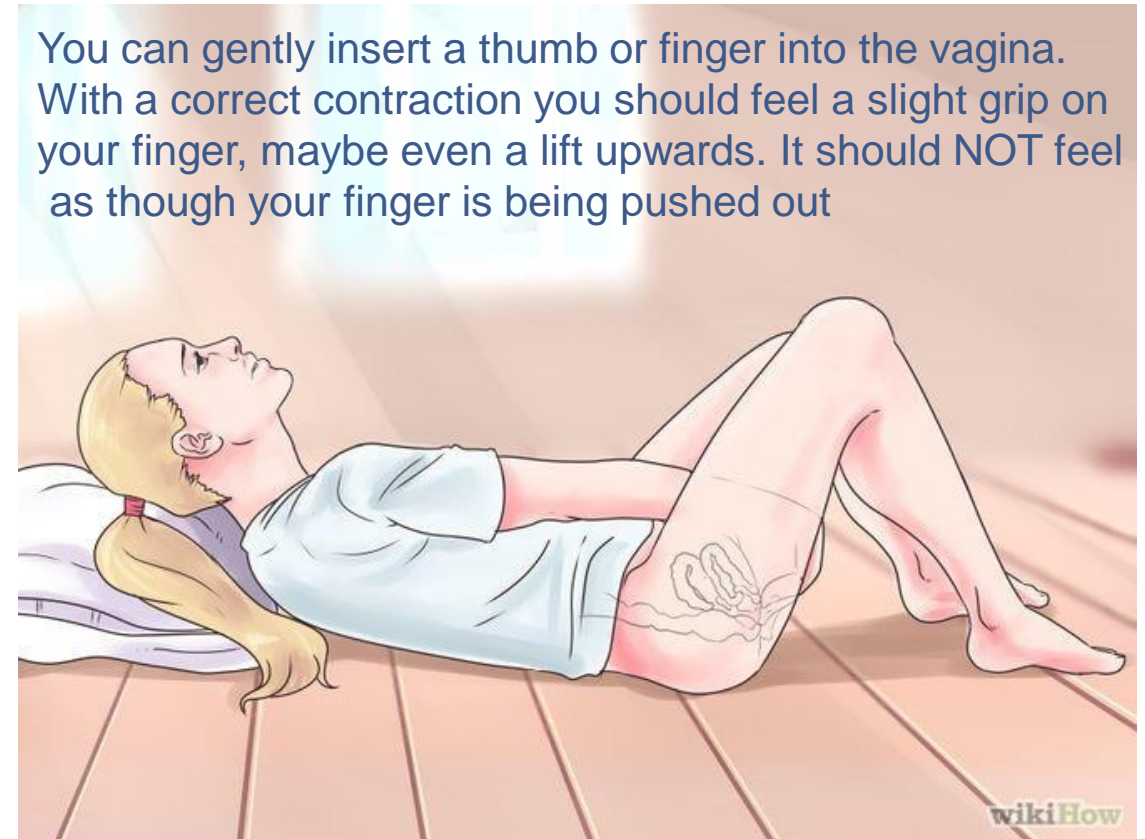
Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Not sure how to find your Pelvic Floor Muscles?

You can use a mirror - with a correct contraction you should see the anus and vaginal area lift away from the mirror (NOT bear down towards it)



You can gently insert a thumb or finger into the vagina. With a correct contraction you should feel a slight grip on your finger, maybe even a lift upwards. It should NOT feel as though your finger is being pushed out



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# How to Do Pelvic Floor Exercises

---

## ☐ Long Squeezes

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, hold the squeeze, then release them fully. How long can you hold it?

Repeat the long squeezes until the pelvic floor muscles tire. How many times can you repeat it?

## ☐ Short Squeezes

Quickly tighten your pelvic floor muscles, then immediately release them fully. How many times can you do this before the muscles tire? This shouldn't be a pulsing motion, you need to make sure you fully relax between each squeeze.

# Exercise Tips

---

- ☐ Always relax the muscles fully after each squeeze \*
- ☐ Aim eventually to do **10 long squeezes**, holding each squeeze for **10 seconds**, followed by **10 short squeezes**
- ☐ Aim to do your pelvic floor muscle exercises at least **3 times each day**. You may find it easier sitting or lying down to start with
- ☐ If you find that you can only hold the squeeze for a short time, or can only do a few before the muscles tire, it may be better to start doing them '**little and often**'

*\*It is important to fully release each squeeze – the aim is to have strong muscles that can fully lengthen too. 'Pulsing' your muscles could shorten them – your muscles need to be able to fully lengthen and stretch around your baby's head during childbirth*



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Exercise Tips

---

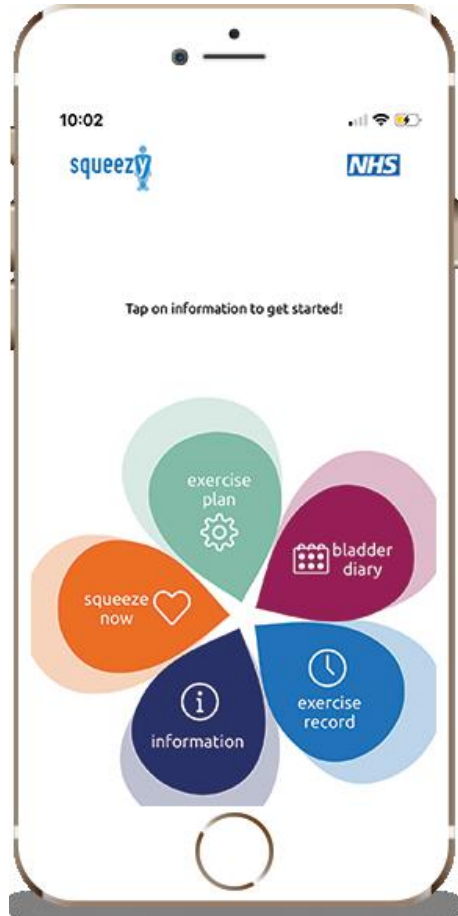
- ☐ You should notice an improvement within **3 - 5 months**
- ☐ As your muscles start to feel stronger, try doing the exercises **standing up**
- ☐ Keep practising your pelvic floor muscle exercises **once each day** to maintain the improvement
- ☐ If you experience pain during or after doing the exercises, or if you don't see any improvement after 5 months, it is important to get advice from a pelvic health physiotherapist



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# How to Remember to do Pelvic Floor Exercises



©[squeezeyapp.com](https://squeezeyapp.com)

- ☐ Make the exercises part of your daily routine, doing them at the same time as another activity you already do regularly e.g. brushing your teeth
- ☐ Set reminders on your phone
- ☐ Try one of the pelvic floor exercise apps available
- ☐ Do the exercises after emptying your bladder, sitting on the toilet lid (but don't practise by stopping your flow of urine)



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Use Your Pelvic Floor Muscles...

---

- ☐ When you cough and sneeze and lift heavy objects  
This helps to support your pelvic organs and prevent bladder leakage
- ☐ When you lift heavy objects  
Gently squeeze your pelvic floor muscles with your lower tummy muscles  
This helps to support your spine, pelvic organs and prevent bladder leakage
- ☐ When you exercise  
For example, practise squeezing your muscles and breathing out as you rise from a squat



# Pelvic Floor Exercises | For More Information

---

- This animation shows the location of your pelvic floor muscles - [Pelvic Floor Anatomy](#) *(opens in new window)*
- The following is a video of one of our physiotherapists explaining how to do pelvic floor exercises during pregnancy - [Pelvic Floor Exercises](#) *(opens in new window)*
- This is a leaflet version - [Pelvic Floor Exercises For Women](#) *(opens in new window)*

# Pregnancy, the Bladder and the Bowels

---

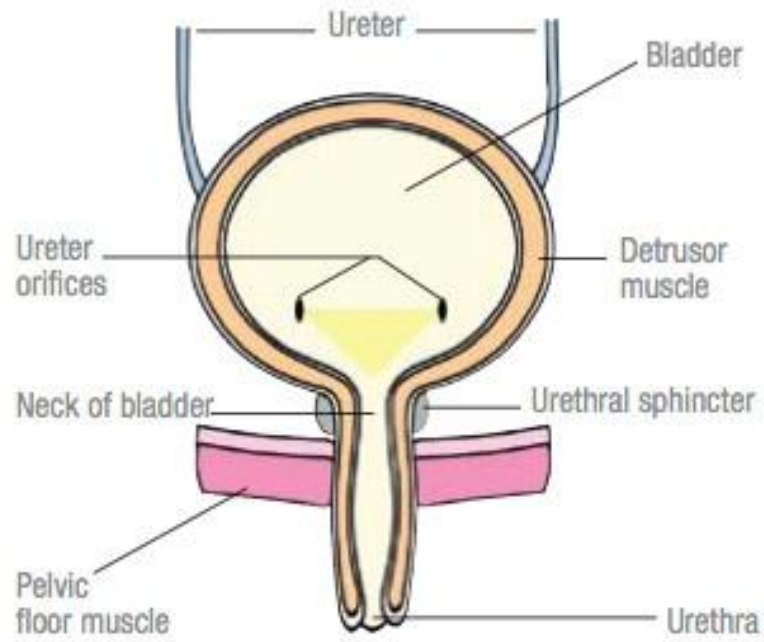
- During pregnancy, many women experience changes to the way that their bladder and bowels function
- Constipation is very common in pregnancy
- You may feel more bloated and experience indigestion
- As your hormone levels surge at the start of pregnancy, you may find you need to empty your bladder more frequently
- As your baby grows, you may find this increases the pressure on your bladder, making you need to go to the toilet more regularly
- The next few slides discuss normal bladder and bowel function and tips to help you manage any symptoms during pregnancy



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# What Does the Bladder Do?



©The Canadian Continence Foundation

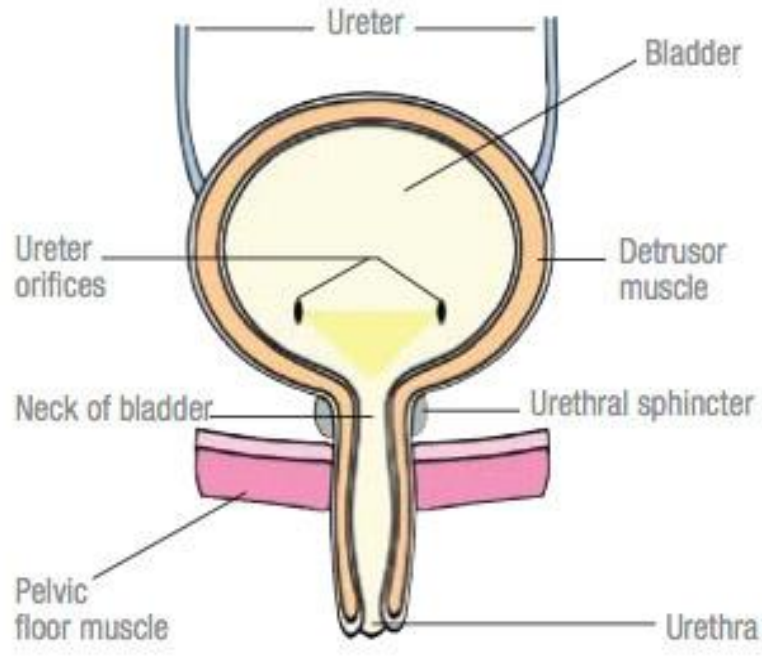
- The kidneys filter blood to remove excess water and waste, and produce urine, which travels from the kidneys to the bladder
- The bladder stores the urine and then empties it out



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# What is a Healthy Bladder?



©The Canadian Continence Foundation

- Holds between **400 to 600mls** of urine\*
- Needs emptying up to around **8 times** per day\*
- And **not more than once** during the night\*
- Gives **plenty of warning** when it is getting full
- Is **free of infections**
- **Empties fully** without pain or blood in the urine

*\*During pregnancy you will probably find that you need to empty your bladder more frequently and may have to get up more than once in the night. You may also be able to hold a smaller volume of urine in your bladder at a time. This is due to a combination of pregnancy hormones and the increasing pressure of your growing baby pushing against your bladder*



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Tips for a Healthy Bladder

---



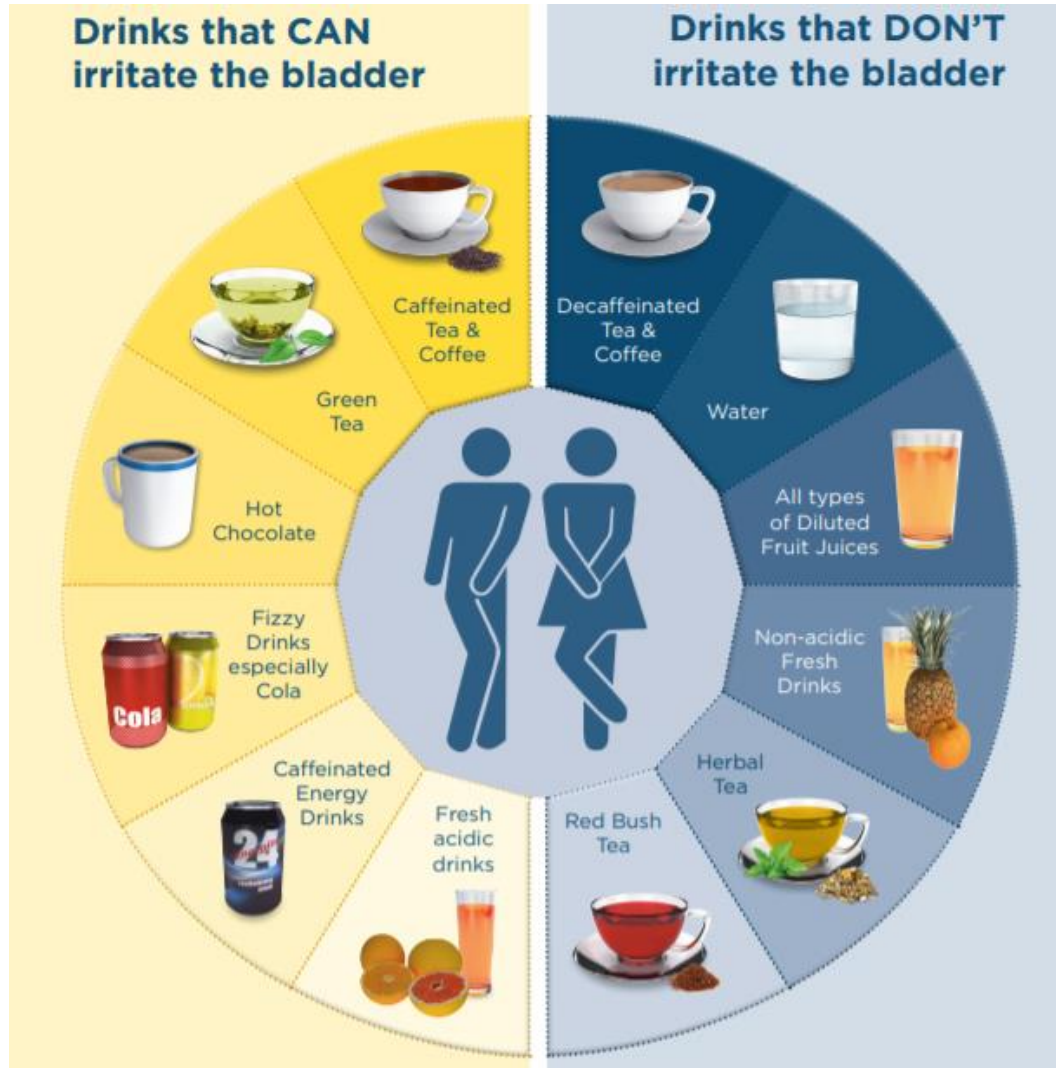
- ☐ **Drink enough fluids**  
but avoid drinking too much
- ☐ **Avoid drinks that may irritate the bladder**  
if you get little warning to pass urine
- ☐ **Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles**  
This also helps with bladder control



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Drinking for a Healthy Bladder



- It is important to stay hydrated during pregnancy
- Ensuring you are hydrated will help reduce symptoms of constipation
- Aim to drink about 1.5 – 2 litres (6 – 8 mugs) a day
- If you are experiencing a lot of vomiting it is even more important that you keep your fluids topped up
- Cut out drinks that can irritate the bladder
- There are guidelines for [caffeine](#) and [alcohol consumption](#) during pregnancy



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# What is Healthy Bowel Function?

---



- Empties anything between **3 times per day** and **3 times per week**
- A poo should be **easily passed**
  - ✓ without straining
  - ✓ without pain
  - ✓ without blood



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board



# Tips for Healthy Bowels

---



© Nourishmeorganics.com

- ☐ Eat enough fibre (aim for 30g per day – gradually increase the fibre in your diet)
- ☐ Drink plenty of fluids (1.5 to 2 litres per day)
- ☐ Adapting your position on the toilet can help to avoid straining
- ☐ Use a foot-stool, lean forwards and take deep breaths in and out, relaxing your pelvic floor muscles to avoid straining



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board



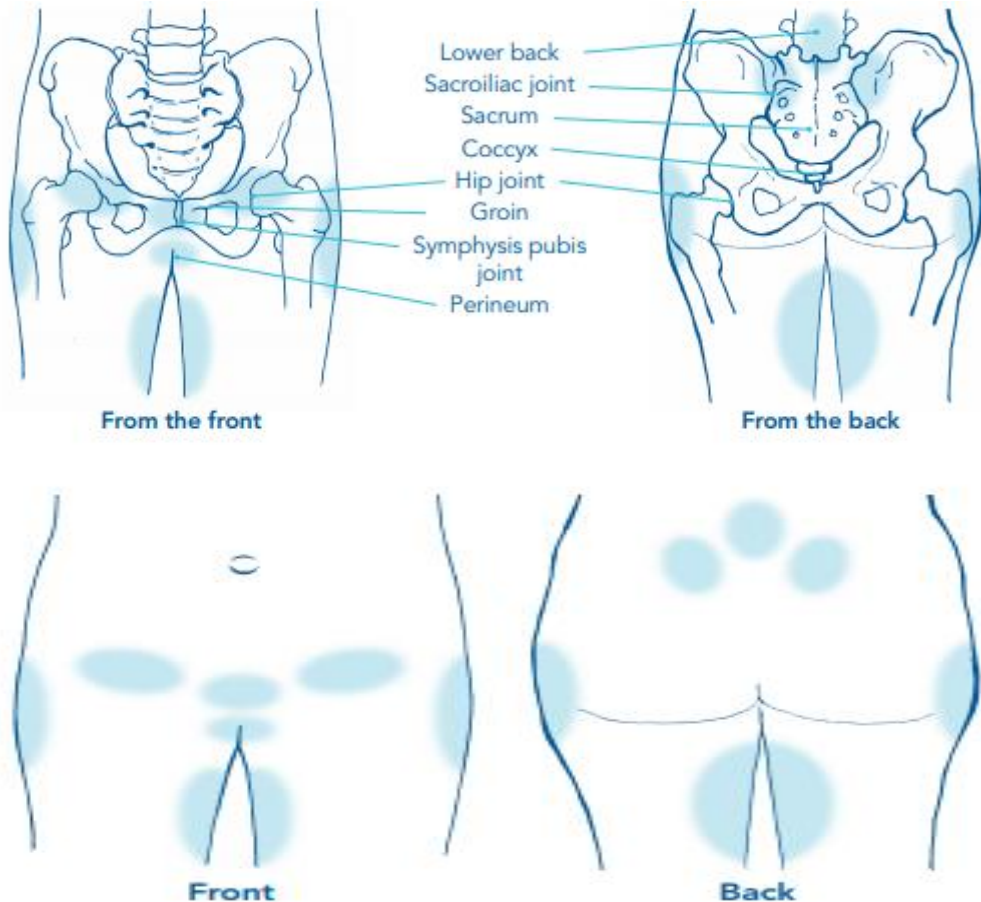
# Healthy Bowels | For More Information

---

- [Tips to Encourage Healthy Bowel Habits](#) *(opens in new window)*
- [Optimal Position for Emptying Your Bowel](#) *(opens in new window)*
- [Fibre Intake](#) *(opens in new window)*

# Pregnancy and Pelvic Girdle Pain

Areas of the body that can be affected by PGP



© POGP 2015

*What is Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP)?*

- PGP refers to pain that a woman may feel during or shortly after her pregnancy in the joints of the pelvis and the surrounding areas of soft tissue such as the buttocks, lower back and groin
- A lot of women will experience small 'niggles' throughout pregnancy, however some can experience more severe symptoms
- If you have symptoms that are worsening or have lasted over 1 week, see our separate presentation on pregnancy-related pelvic girdle pain for more advice and information



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Why do Abdominal Exercises During Pregnancy?

---



- Your deep tummy muscles help to support your spine
- To ease low back pain and symptoms of PGP
- To help reduce any separation of the tummy muscles (known as Diastasis Recti)
- They also work with your pelvic floor muscles to help support your pelvic organs



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# How to find your Deep Abdominal Muscles

---

- ☐ Lie on your back comfortably with your fingertips resting on the inside of each hip bone (or on your lower bump, above your pubic bone)  
If you are 19 weeks pregnant or over, ensure that you prop your head and shoulders up on a few pillows
- ☐ Take a deep breath in
- ☐ As you breathe out, squeeze the muscles around your back passage and slowly draw your lower tummy muscles in towards your spine as though squeezing into a tight belt  
You should feel your tummy muscles tighten underneath your fingertips or just above your pubic bone
- ☐ Hold this position whilst gently breathing in and out
- ☐ Try and hold for 5 seconds, building up to 10. Aim to repeat up to 10 times



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# How to do Abdominal Exercises Continued

---

- ☐ You can also try these exercises in side lying, sitting, on all 4's or even when standing up
- ☐ Make sure you don't hold your breath
- ☐ Gradually build up how long you can hold for and the number of repetitions
- ☐ Aim to do them twice daily
- ☐ Try engaging your abdominal muscles about 30% when walking around, going up and down stairs or moving from one position to another, particularly if you are experiencing PGP symptoms



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# How to Use Your Abdominal Muscles



©spinegroupalabama.com

- ☐ Your abdominal muscles work with your pelvic floor muscles to help to support your spine
- ☐ When you lift something heavy, draw in your pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles
- ☐ It's also a good idea to keep the object you're lifting close to you, and to use your leg muscles



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Physical Activity During Pregnancy

---

- Keeping or gradually becoming more active has great health benefits
- It has been shown to help to
  - Control weight gain
  - Reduce high blood pressure problems
  - Prevent diabetes in pregnancy (gestational diabetes)
  - Have positive effects on the future health of your baby
- It also improves
  - Fitness
  - Sleep
  - Mood



# Physical Activity During Pregnancy



The chart on the left shows the recommendations for exercise during pregnancy

(UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines 2019)

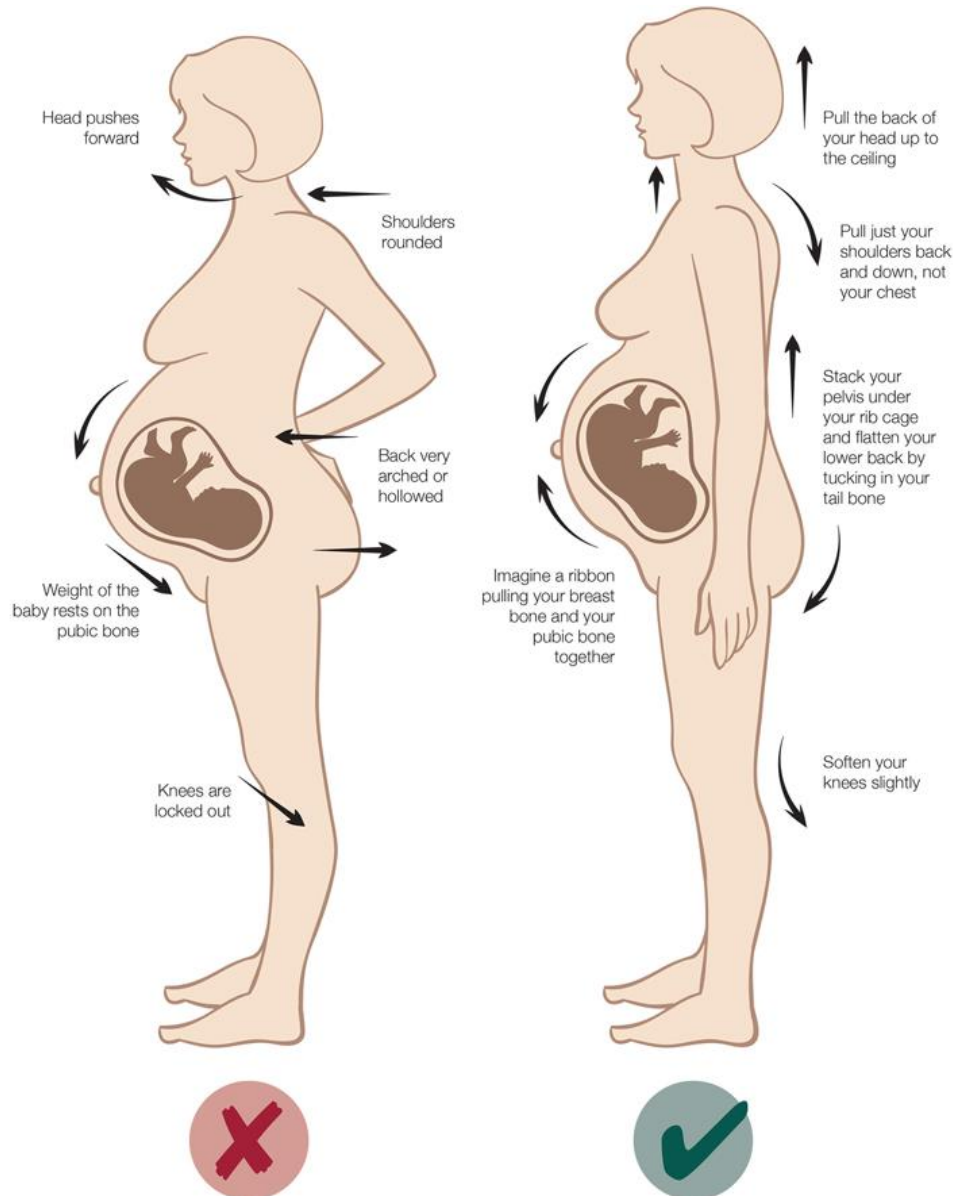


GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board



# Maintaining Good Posture



- As your baby grows, your tummy and pelvic floor muscles lengthen and stretch, this can alter your posture and contribute to PGP
- Think about your posture throughout the day and make small corrections to ease your symptoms



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

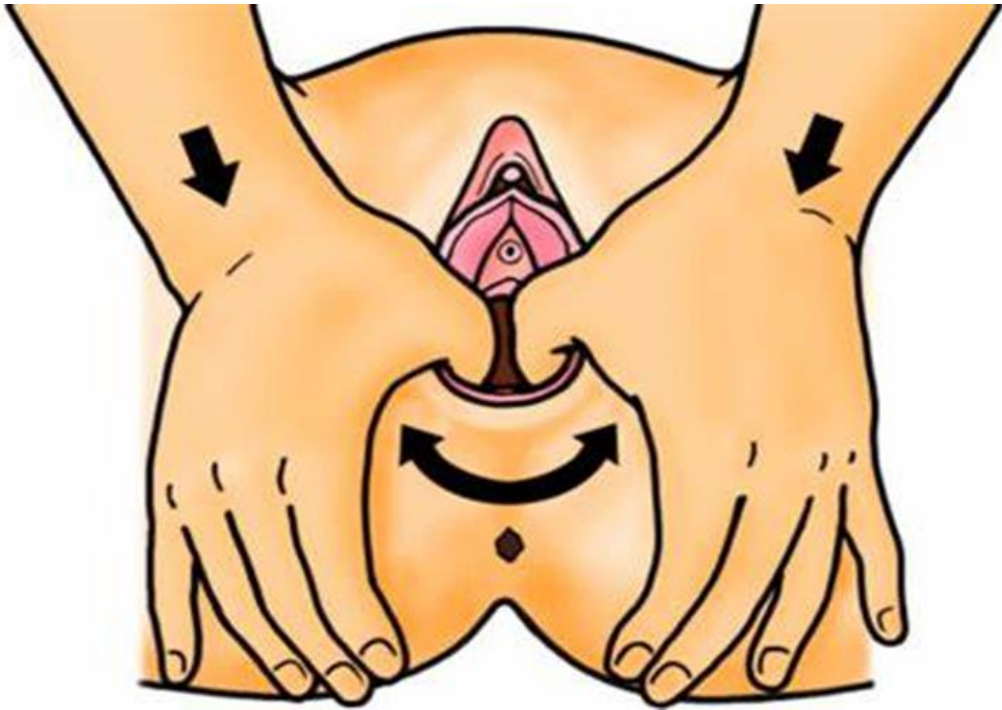
# Perineal Massage During Pregnancy

---

- The perineum is the area between the vagina and the back passage
- Perineal massage is a technique used to stretch the perineum
- By making it more supple and stretchy, it can help prepare for labour and birth, making it easier for the baby to come out. It is thought that it can reduce the risk of:
  - tearing
  - requiring an episiotomy (a cut to the perineum during childbirth)
  - needing stitches after labour
- If this is your first pregnancy commence the massage at 34 weeks
- For other pregnancies, start at 36 weeks

# How to do Perineal Massage

The diagram below shows you the location you are aiming to stretch during perineal massage



- Ensure you are in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed or, in the bath if you prefer
- You don't need to use lubricant but if you choose to then use a drop on your thumbs \*
- Insert thumbs into the vagina about 4-5cms
- Gently press backwards and down and move side to side in a U shape
- Increase the pressure as you get used to it until the tissue just begins to sting
- Repeat for a couple of minutes
- Your partner could also do this for you, just make sure they are gentle

*\*Recommended oils for lubrication could be olive oil, sunflower oil, or almond oil (as long as you don't have a nut allergy)*



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Rest and Relaxation in Pregnancy

---

- It is not unusual to feel tired or develop aches and pains during pregnancy, so rest and relaxation is important
- It is also important for your mental health and wellbeing
- Relaxation is a technique you can learn during your pregnancy and afterwards. It helps reduce or prevent tension building up
- Try and take a few rests throughout the day if you are feeling exhausted
- Try relaxing in the evening with a warm bath
- Try some gentle yoga or stretches
- Try some [mindfulness or meditation](#)
- Try the [Mitchell Method of Relaxation](#)



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Key Points to Remember

---

- Pregnancy can impact your posture, the way you and your pelvis moves, and your bladder and bowel function
- Different women will experience different symptoms throughout their pregnancy
- It is important to work on strengthening both your pelvic floor muscles and abdominal muscles throughout pregnancy in order to minimise the weakening of the muscles and increase the likelihood of a good post-natal recovery
- Access the ABUHB online resources for further information on keeping active and healthy throughout your pregnancy



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Useful Resources

---

## Useful websites

- [ABUHB Pelvic Health Physiotherapy](#)

## Useful leaflets

- [Fit for Birth](#)
- [Fit for Pregnancy](#)
- [Pregnancy Related Pelvic Girdle Pain](#)