

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy in Postnatal Care -The Pelvic Floor



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Contents

Introduction

- What is the pelvic floor?
- Pregnancy, childbirth and the pelvic floor
- Pelvic floor injury in childbirth
- Pelvic floor exercises

The Effects of Pregnancy and Labour on the Body: An Overview

- Pregnancy and childbirth (including both vaginal births and Caesarean sections) can have several effects on the body
- The muscles in your pelvis and abdomen may be stretched and weakened following the birth of your baby
- Depending on your birth, you may initially feel uncomfortable in the perineum (area around the vagina and back passage) or abdomen (tummy)
- Hormonal changes in the postnatal period can affect your bladder and bowel habits and your pelvic floor muscles
- You may find that you have to get to the toilet more urgently than usual when you need to wee/empty your bowels
- Some women can experience low back pain or pelvic pain after having their baby

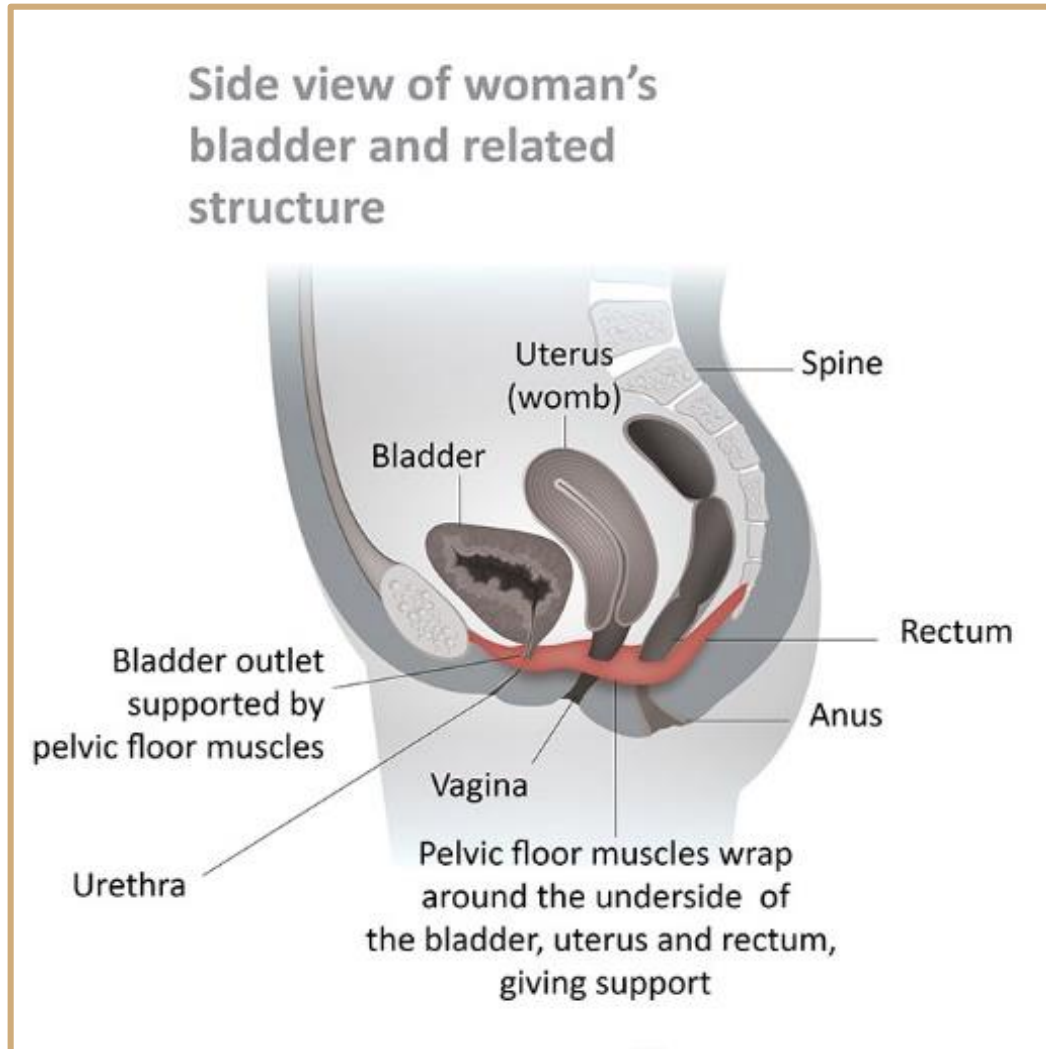
This presentation will provide more detail about the possible affects you may experience during the postnatal period and will offer advice on getting back to your normal daily routine



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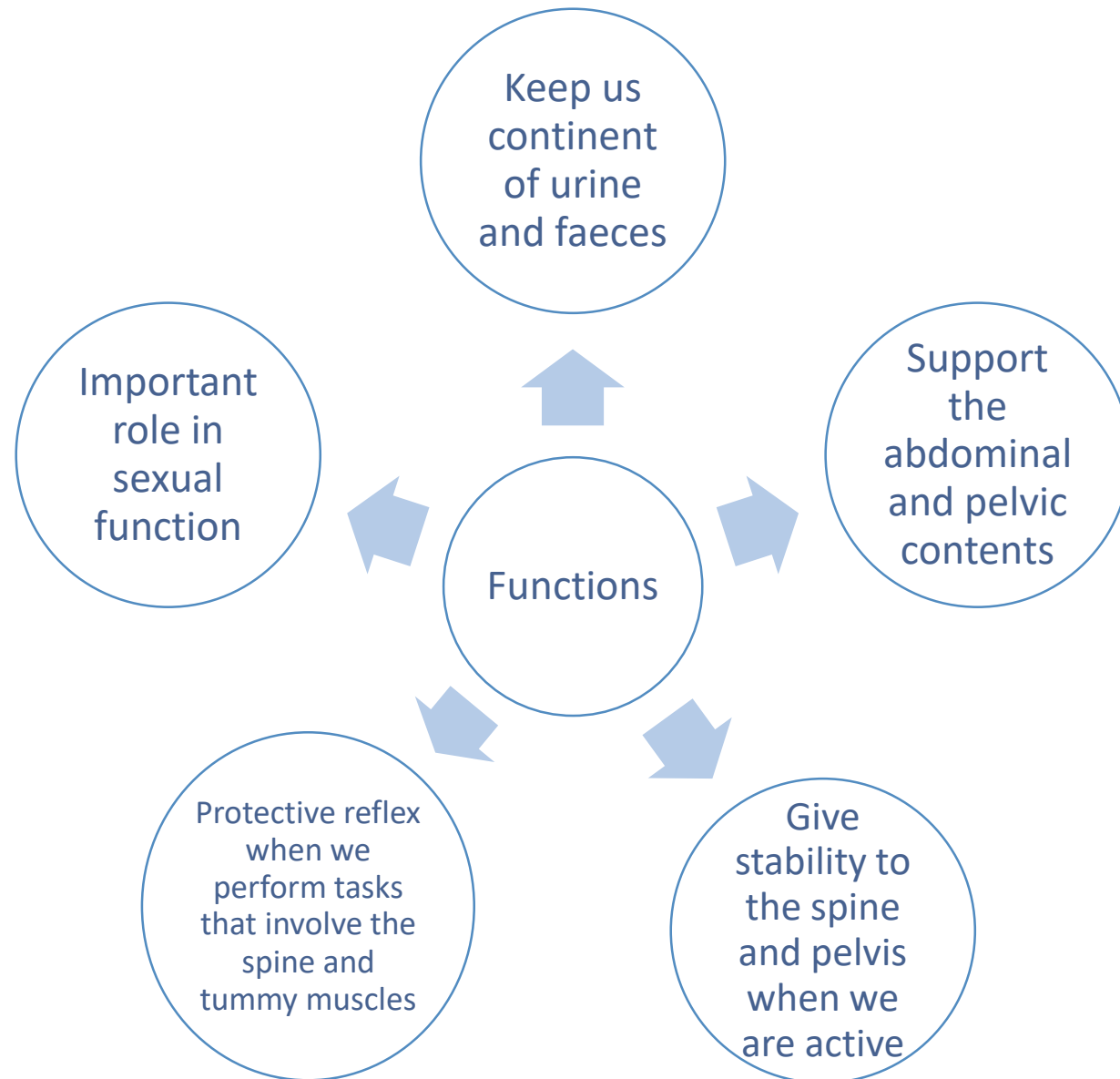
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What are the Pelvic Floor Muscles?



- 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?



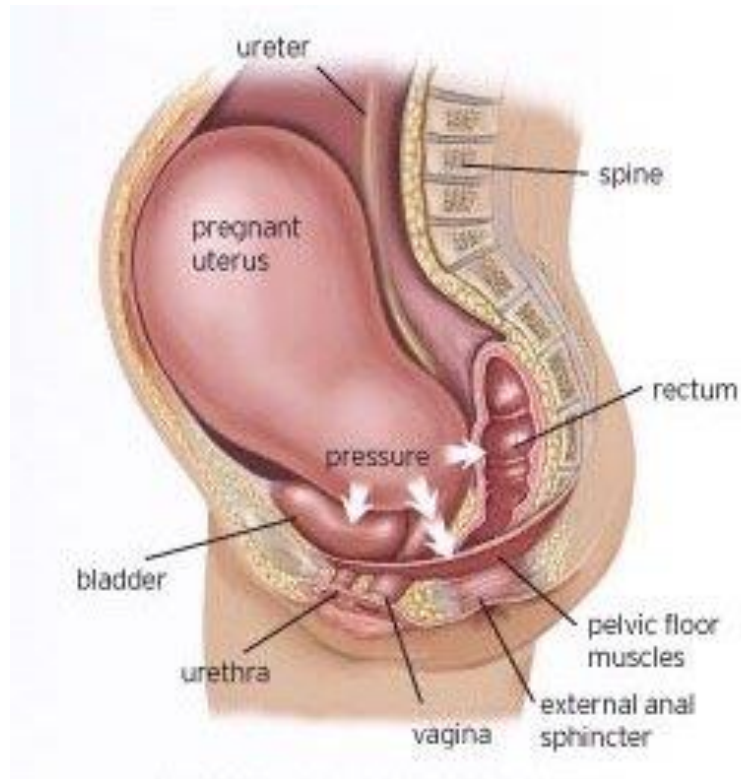
Strong pelvic floor muscles are particularly important in pregnancy to ensure that your pelvis and pelvic contents are well supported and to help keep you continent as your baby grows



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How does Pregnancy Affect the Pelvic Floor?



Baby and Me Fitness 2020

Side view of pregnant female pelvis

During pregnancy, the pelvic floor muscles must cope with:

- An increased load as your baby grows bigger and heavier
- Hormonal changes affecting your body throughout pregnancy and the postnatal period
- These factors can lead to a weakening of the pelvic floor muscles and ligaments

How does Childbirth Affect the Pelvic Floor?

A vaginal delivery can have the following effects on the pelvic floor:

- Bruising
- Swelling
- Perineal or pelvic floor muscle tears
- Episiotomy/cut to the pelvic floor

All the above can lead to a weakening of the pelvic floor muscles

Additional Risk Factors for the Pelvic Floor

The following are all factors that increase the likelihood that you will have weakened pelvic floor muscles following the birth of your baby

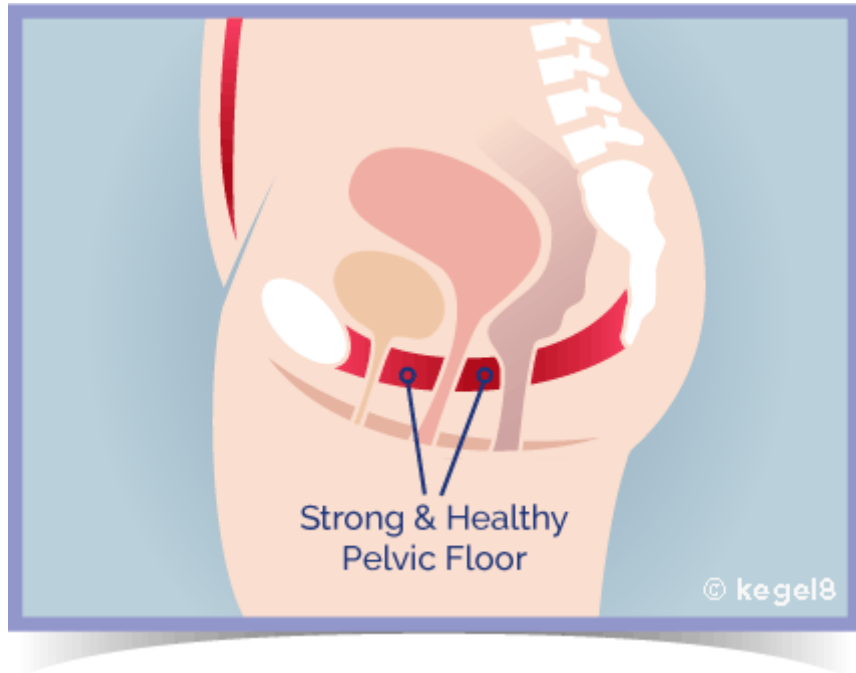
- Large baby
 - Multi-parity (if you've had more than one child)
 - Prolonged pushing stage (over 2 hours)
 - Forceps delivery
 - Episiotomy (cut)
 - 3rd or 4th degree tear
 - Epidural / spinal anaesthesia
 - Twins / triplets
 - History of long-term constipation
 - Obesity (Body Mass Index over 30)
 - First baby when over 35 years old
- Weakened pelvic floor muscles can lead to bladder and/or bowel urgency and incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse and decreased sexual sensation
 - **Strengthening weak pelvic floor muscles after pregnancy can prevent or treat these**



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Why do Pelvic Floor Exercises after Childbirth?



- To prevent, cure or improve bladder leakage
- To prevent or reduce prolapse symptoms
- To improve your sexual function
- To help ease back pain
- To help you return safely and comfortably to your normal levels of activity



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When should I start the exercises following the birth of my baby?

- You can start your pelvic floor muscle exercises as soon as possible after you have had your baby *
- You can do the exercises in varying positions - if you are sore try doing them lying on your side
- Don't worry, it is normal for the muscles to feel weaker than they were before childbirth, this is why these exercises are really important!
- You may wish to start by doing gentle, rhythmic tightening and relaxing of the pelvic floor muscles as this may help to ease discomfort, pain and swelling, and can aid healing if you have had a tear or stitches
- You could also try cooling the painful area with an ice pack or gel pack as this may lessen the discomfort. Wrap the ice/gel pack in a clean damp towel and apply for 5 minutes at a time only

** Unless you have a urinary catheter (a tube in your bladder). If so, wait until after it has been removed, and you are passing urine normally*



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How to Find & Squeeze your Pelvic Floor Muscles

- ☐ Lie down or sit upright, in a comfortable position
- ☐ 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

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

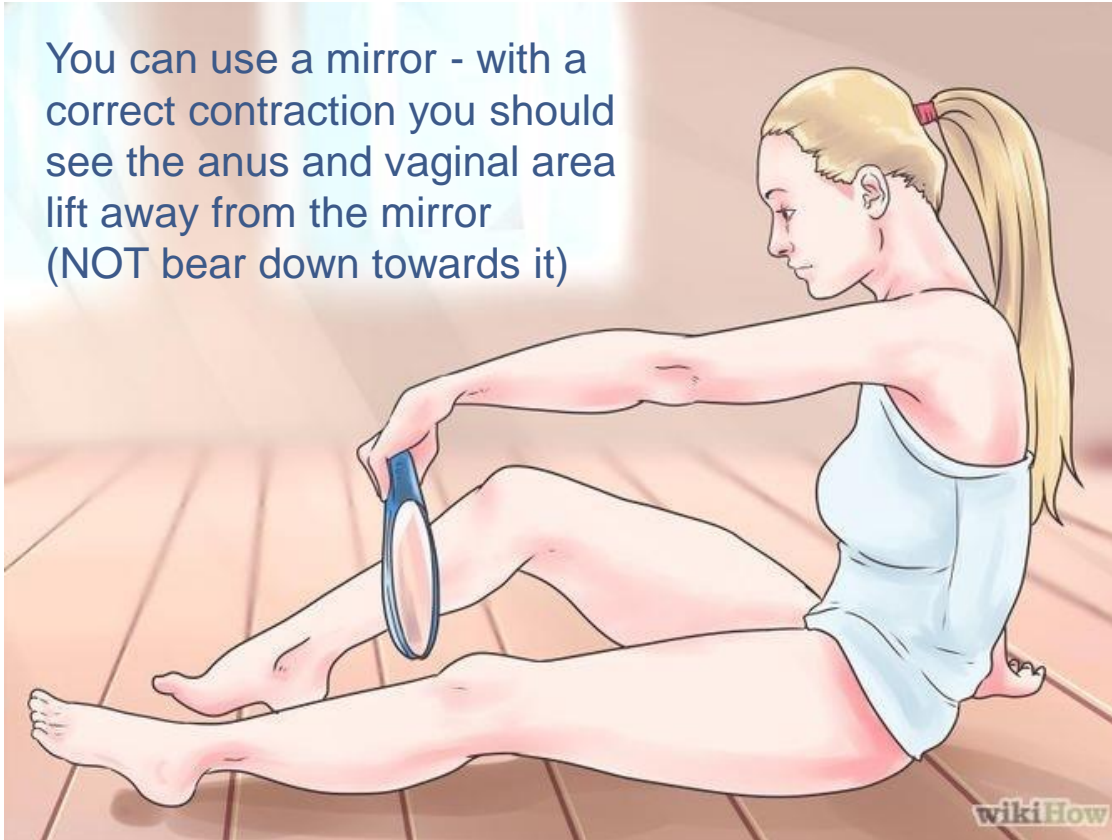


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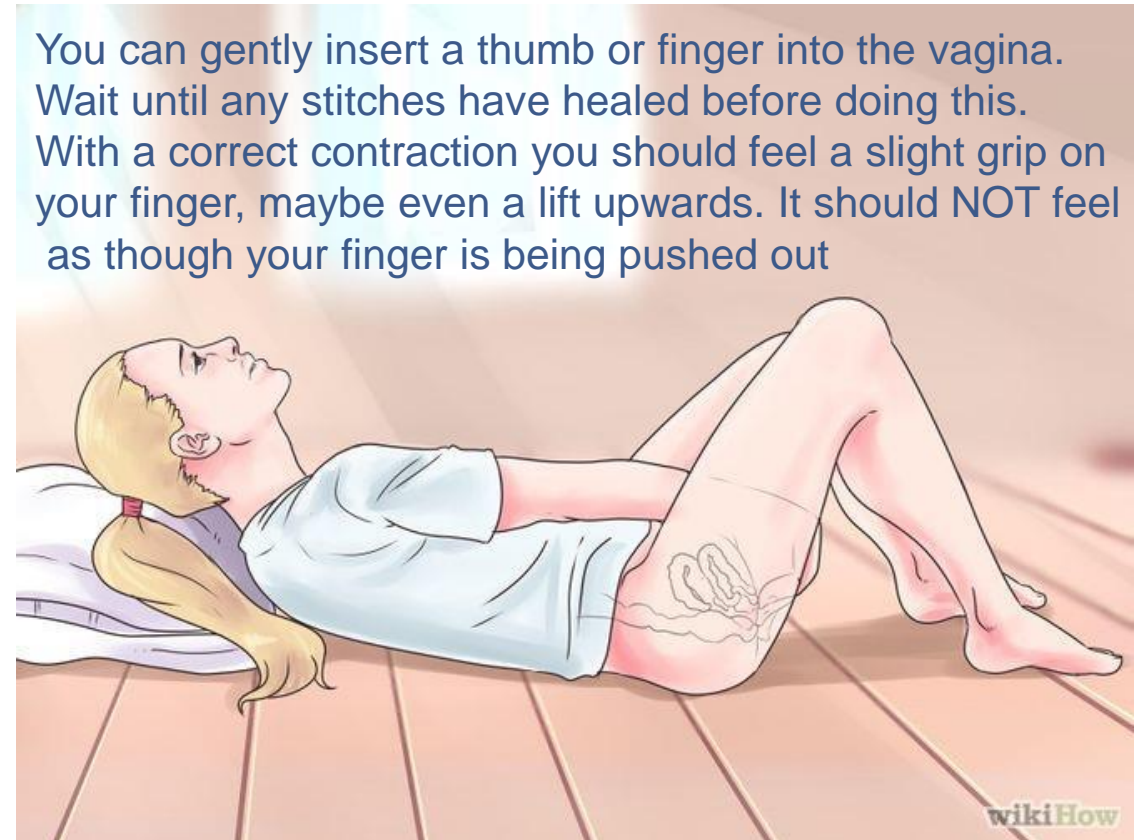
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Not sure how to find your Pelvic Floor Muscles?

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. Wait until any stitches have healed before doing this. 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



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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?

If you have any discomfort, pain and swelling in the genital area, it often helps to start by doing gentle, rhythmic tightening and relaxing of the pelvic floor muscles. It can also aid healing if you have had a tear or stitches

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**'

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



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How to Remember to do Pelvic Floor Exercises



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- ☐ Make the exercises part of your daily routine, doing them at the same time as another activity you already do regularly e.g. feeding your baby
- ☐ 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)



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Use Your Pelvic Floor Muscles...

- ☐ When you cough and sneeze

This helps to support your pelvic organs and prevent bladder leakage

- ☐ When you lift anything heavy

Gently squeeze your pelvic floor muscles and 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



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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, the same principles apply after you have had your baby - [Pelvic Floor Exercises](#) *(opens in new window)*
- This is a leaflet version - [Pelvic Floor Exercises For Women](#) *(opens in new window)*



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