

Urinary Incontinence

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Information

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- What is urinary incontinence?
- Treatment of urinary incontinence
- Anatomy of the pelvis
- Pelvic floor exercises explained
- Other helpful advice, including:
 - Healthy bowel and bladder habits
 - Healthy fluid intake
 - Exercising safely and comfortably
 - Comfortable sexual intercourse
 - When and how to ask for help

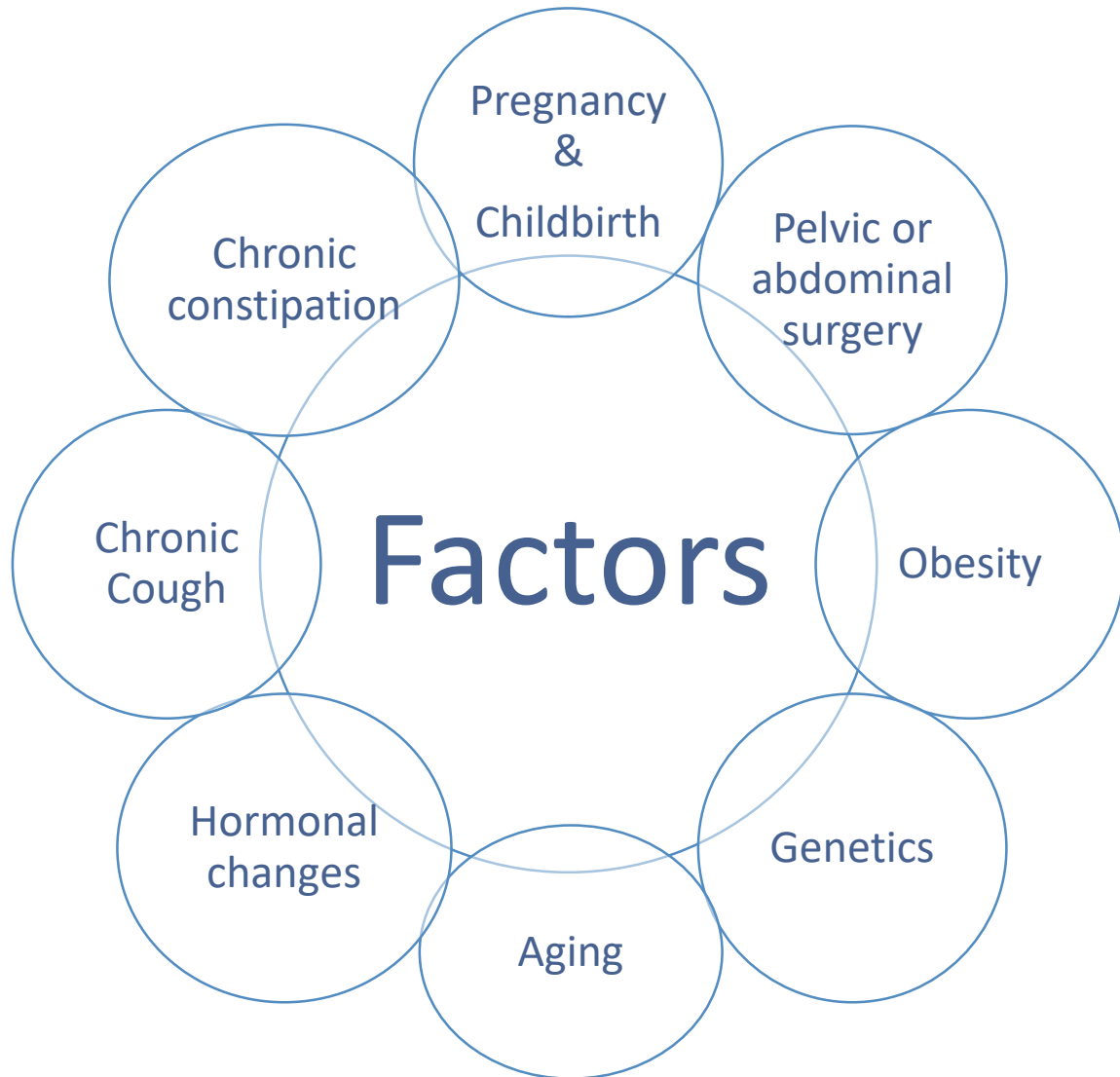
What is Urinary Incontinence?

- Urinary incontinence is the unintentional passing of urine (also known as bladder leakage)
- It is a common problem, affecting up to **1 in 3 women**
- Although common, **it is not normal and can be treated**
- There are several different types of urinary incontinence

Common Types of Urinary Incontinence

- **Stress Urinary Incontinence**
 - Urine leaks out at times when there is physical pressure on the bladder, for example when you cough, sneeze or exercise
- **Urge Urinary Incontinence**
 - Urine leaks out as you feel a sudden intense urge to pee, or soon afterwards – meaning that you don't make it to the toilet in time
- **Mixed Urinary Incontinence**
 - Combination of stress and urge incontinence
- **Overactive Bladder**
 - Combination of increased urinary frequency, urinary urgency and urge urinary incontinence

Factors that can cause or increase your risk of Urinary Incontinence



- Often a combination of factors lead to symptoms
- Some factors are not changeable, such as aging...
- But many can be changed, such as strengthening weak pelvic floor muscles



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Treating Urinary Incontinence



- Pelvic Floor Exercises have been proven to improve or cure **stress, urge** and **mixed urinary incontinence**
- **Lifestyle changes** can affect many of the factors that cause or contribute to urinary incontinence

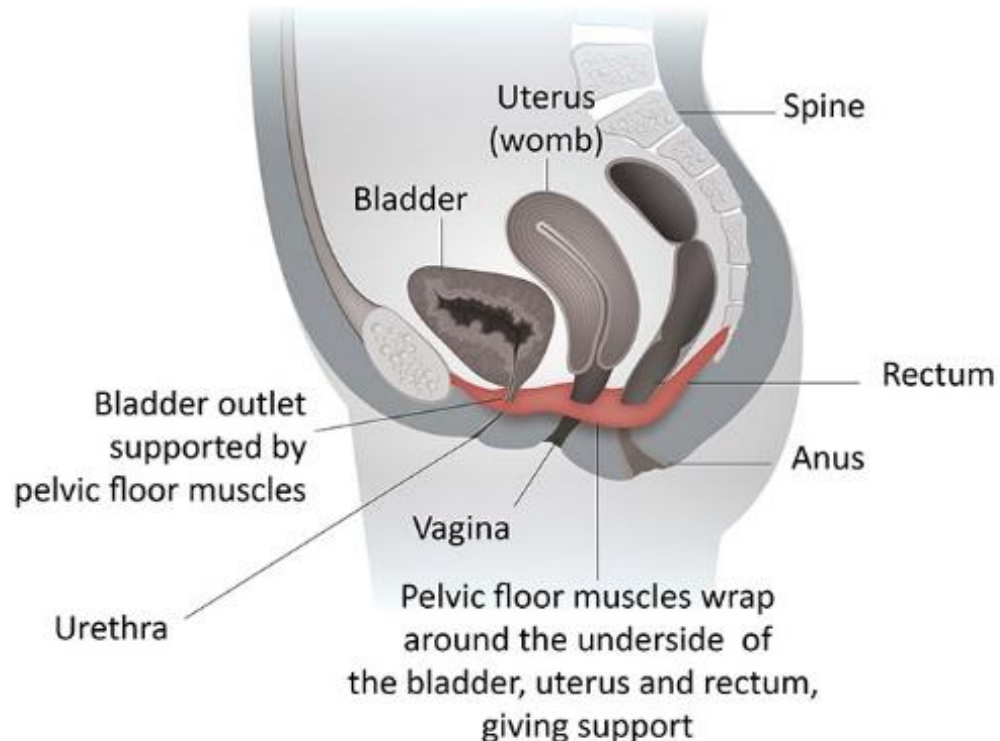


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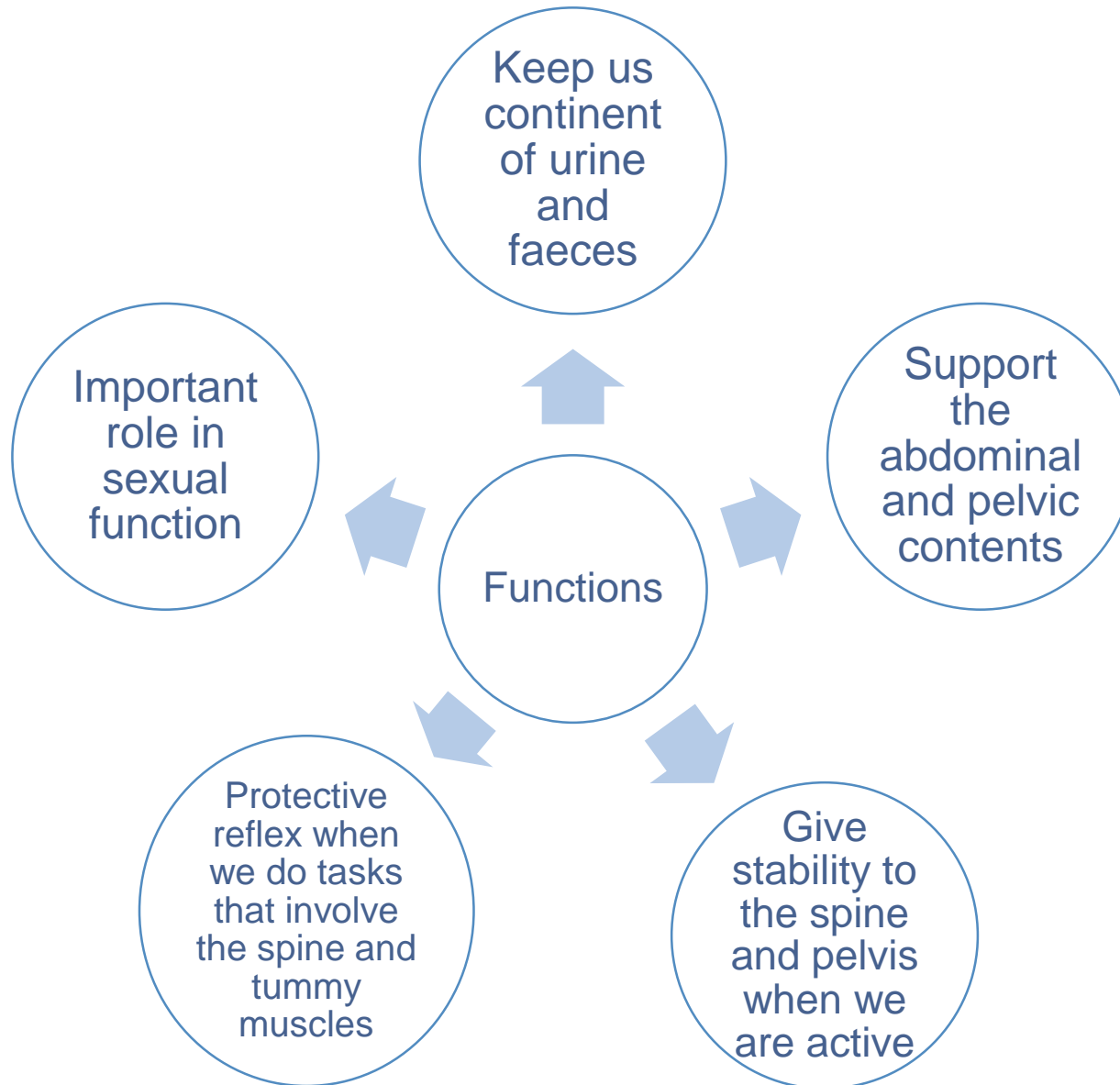
What are the Pelvic Floor Muscles?

Side view of woman's bladder and related structure



- The pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles that span the underside of your pelvis, forming the 'floor' of your pelvis
- They form a 'hammock' of muscles, inserting into the pubic bone at the front, fanning out to the sides 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

Functions of the Pelvic Floor Muscles



Pelvic health physiotherapy aims to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles in order to provide a firm support for the pelvic organs which can help improve symptoms of urinary incontinence



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Weak pelvic floor muscles may lead to...

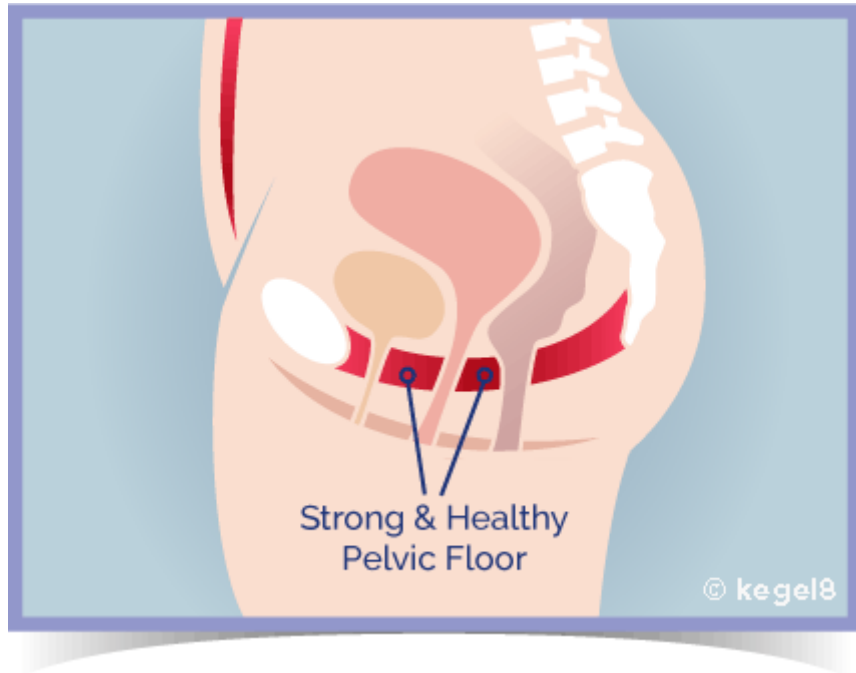
- Stress urinary incontinence
- Urinary frequency (needing to empty your bladder more than about **8 times** per day)
- Urinary urgency (having to rush to get to the toilet in time)
- Urge urinary incontinence
- Pelvic organ prolapse
- Bowel control problems

Pelvic floor muscles that don't relax easily or fully may lead to...

- Hesitancy with emptying your bladder*
- Straining and difficulty emptying your bowels
- Pelvic pain*
- Painful sexual intercourse*

**If you experience any of these symptoms, speak to your GP as they may need further investigation*

Why do Pelvic Floor Exercises?



- Can cure or improve urinary incontinence
- Can reduce prolapse symptoms
- Can improve your sexual function
- Can help ease back pain



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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 - a squeeze and lift

How to Find & Squeeze your Pelvic Floor Muscles

✓ Breathe normally

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

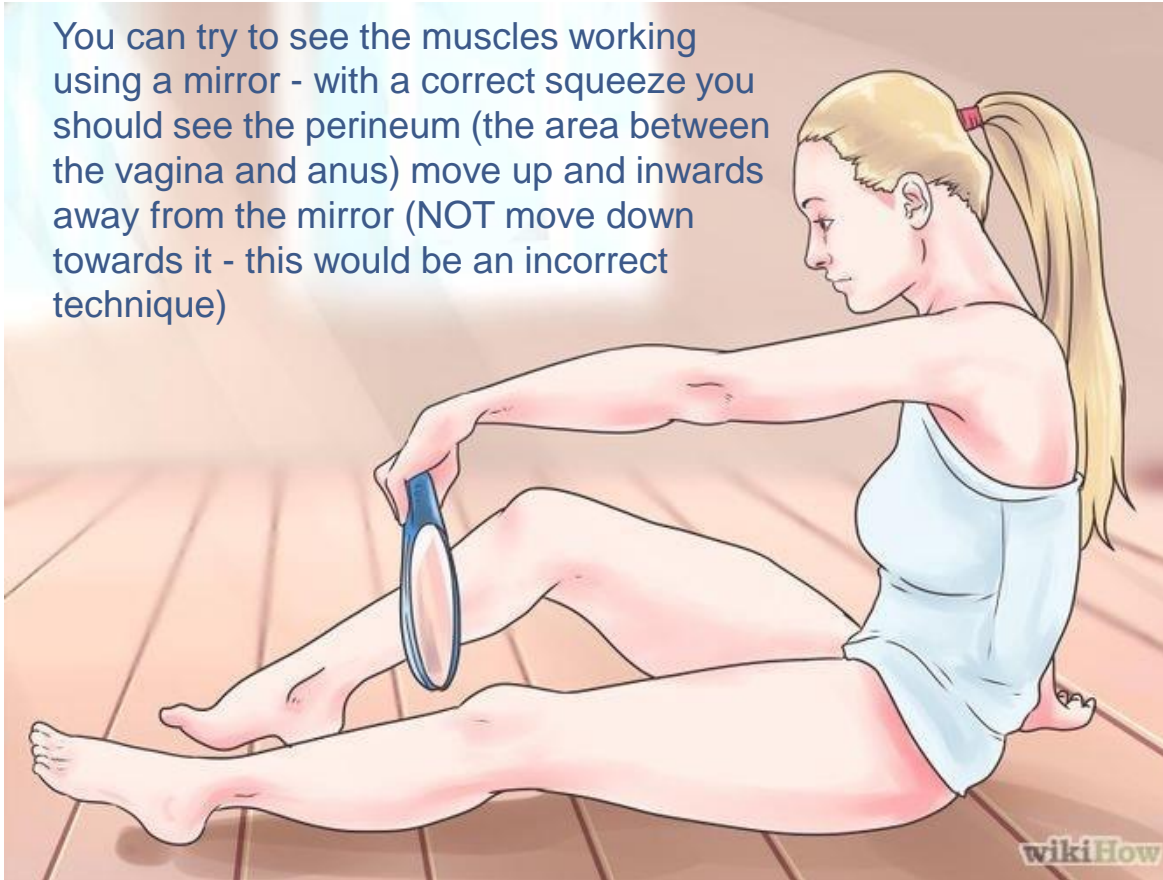
✓ Relax your muscles fully after every squeeze

✗ Hold your breath

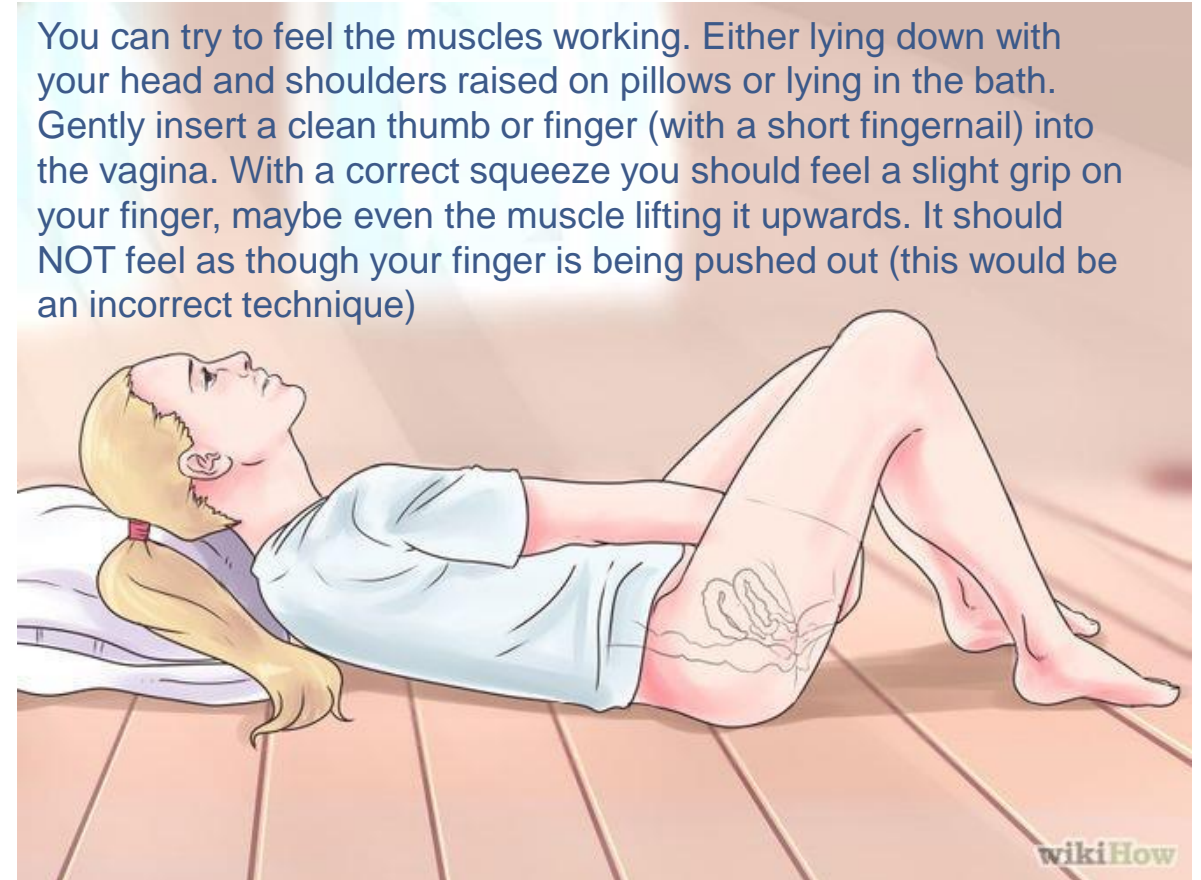
✗ Squeeze your buttock or leg muscles

Not sure how to find your Pelvic Floor Muscles?

You can try to see the muscles working using a mirror - with a correct squeeze you should see the perineum (the area between the vagina and anus) move up and inwards away from the mirror (NOT move down towards it - this would be an incorrect technique)



You can try to feel the muscles working. Either lying down with your head and shoulders raised on pillows or lying in the bath. Gently insert a clean thumb or finger (with a short fingernail) into the vagina. With a correct squeeze you should feel a slight grip on your finger, maybe even the muscle lifting it upwards. It should NOT feel as though your finger is being pushed out (this would be an incorrect technique)



**If you are sexually active you can try squeezing your pelvic floor muscles during sex.
Ask your partner if they can feel the squeeze**



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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 (resting for a few seconds between each one) 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 in a row 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.

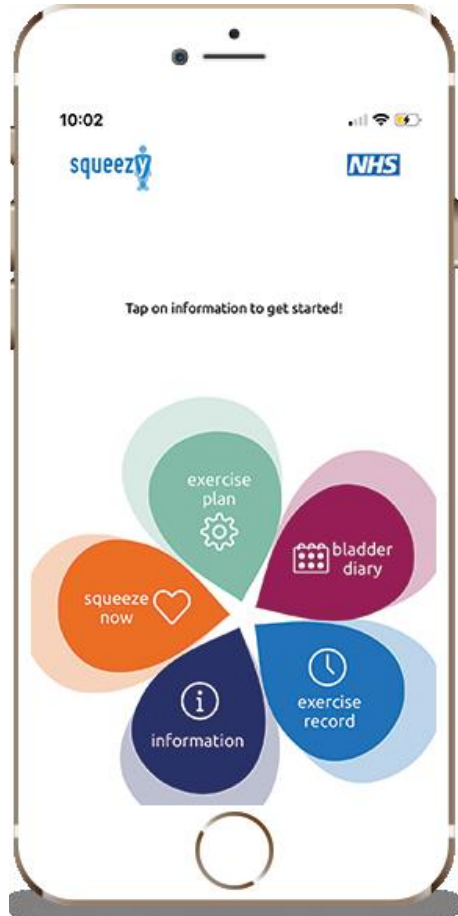
Exercise Tips

- ☐ 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**'

Squeeze 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

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. brushing your teeth or sitting on the toilet lid after emptying your bladder (but don't practise by stopping your flow of urine)
- ☐ You could set reminders on your phone
- ☐ You could try one of the pelvic floor exercise apps available



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Exercise Tips

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

There are many devices advertised on-line and in magazines for strengthening the pelvic floor muscles. They may not be advisable for you to use, so we recommend that you discuss this with a pelvic health physiotherapist before buying one



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Pelvic Floor Exercises | For More Information

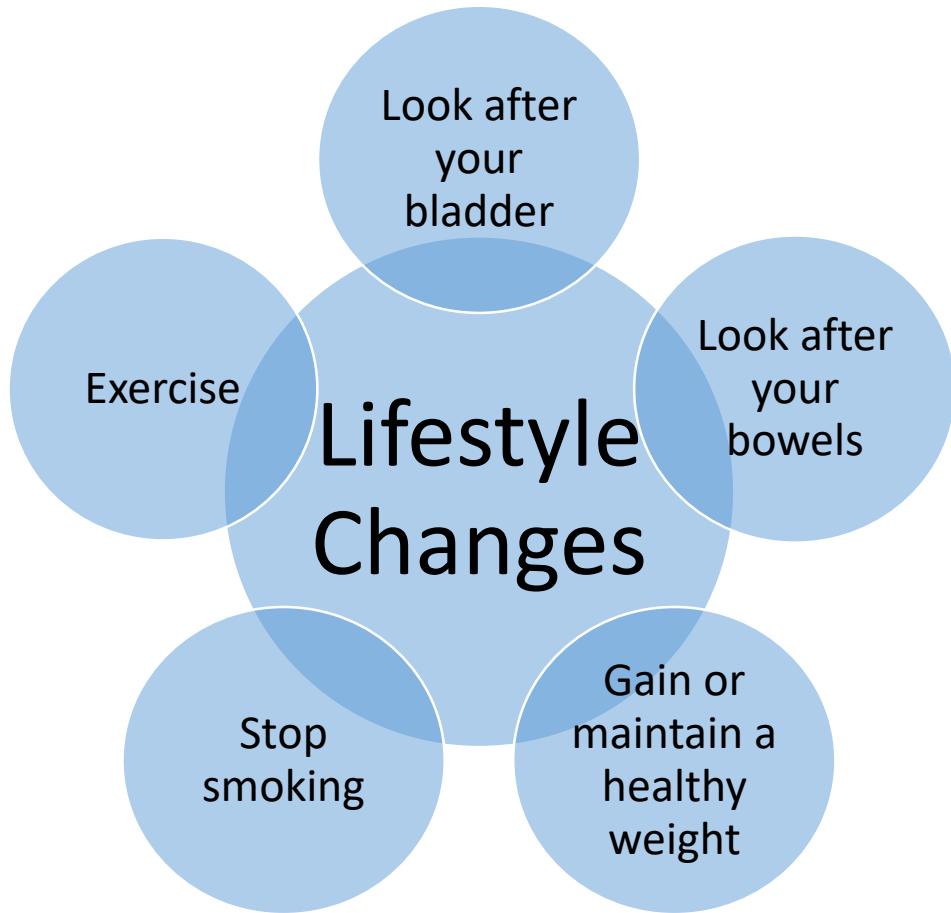
- This animation shows the location of your pelvic floor muscles - [Pelvic Floor Anatomy](#) *(opens in new window)*
- The following is a video of one of our physiotherapists explaining how to do pelvic floor exercises during pregnancy - but the same principles apply at any other time - [Pelvic Floor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



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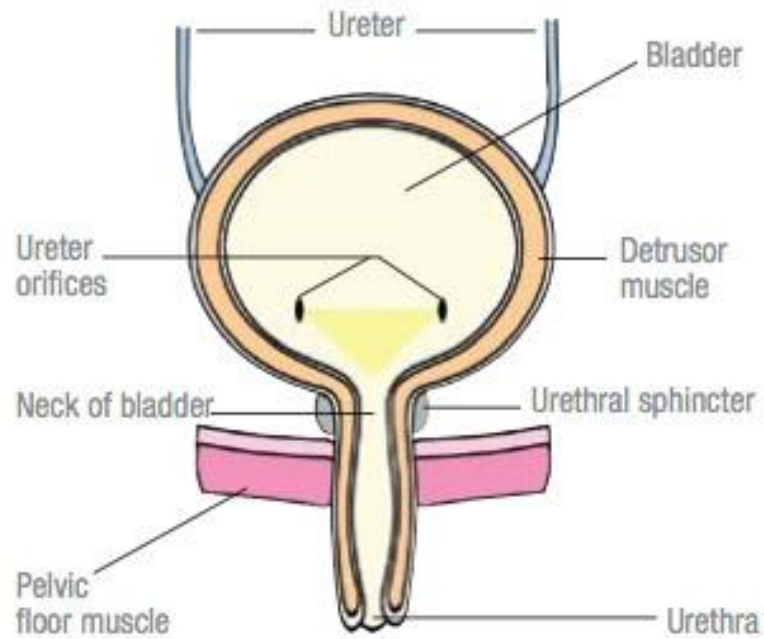
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What Lifestyle Changes might help?



- Making healthy lifestyle changes can often help to reduce symptoms
- These will be explained in the next few slides

What Does the Bladder Do?



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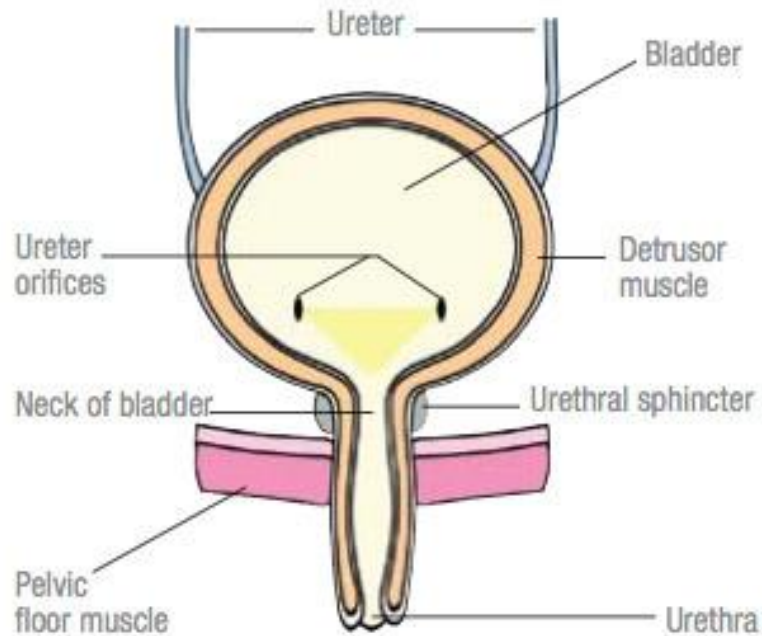
- The kidneys filter blood to remove excess water and waste, and produce urine, which travels from the kidneys to the bladder
- The bladder stores the urine and then empties it out
- If you have Urge Incontinence it means that you have an Overactive Bladder (also known as OAB)



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What is a Healthy Bladder?



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- 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



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Tips for a Healthy Bladder



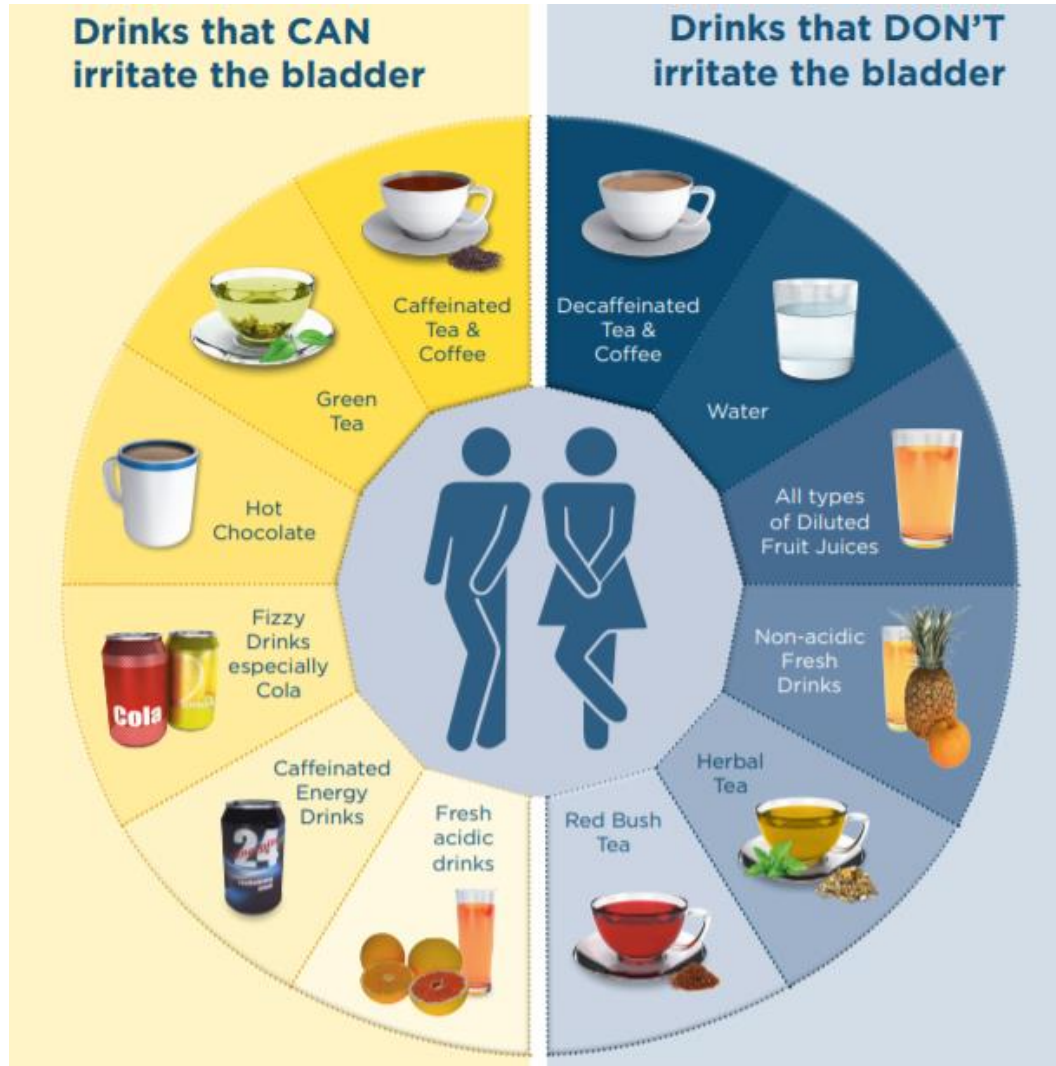
- ☐ **Drink enough fluids**
but avoid drinking too much
- ☐ **Avoid drinks that may irritate the bladder**
if you have to rush to pass urine
- ☐ **Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles**
This also helps with bladder control
- ☐ **Avoid 'just in case wees'**
Going for a wee when you don't have a strong urge can decrease your bladder capacity and worsen your bladder symptoms



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Drinking for a Healthy Bladder



If you find that you have to rush to the toilet to pass urine

- Drink about 1.5 – 2 litres (6 – 8 mugs) of fluid a day
- Cut out drinks that can irritate the bladder for a few weeks to see if it makes a difference
- Avoid drinking too much alcohol
- **Gradually** swap over from caffeinated to decaffeinated drinks to avoid a caffeine withdrawal headache

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

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



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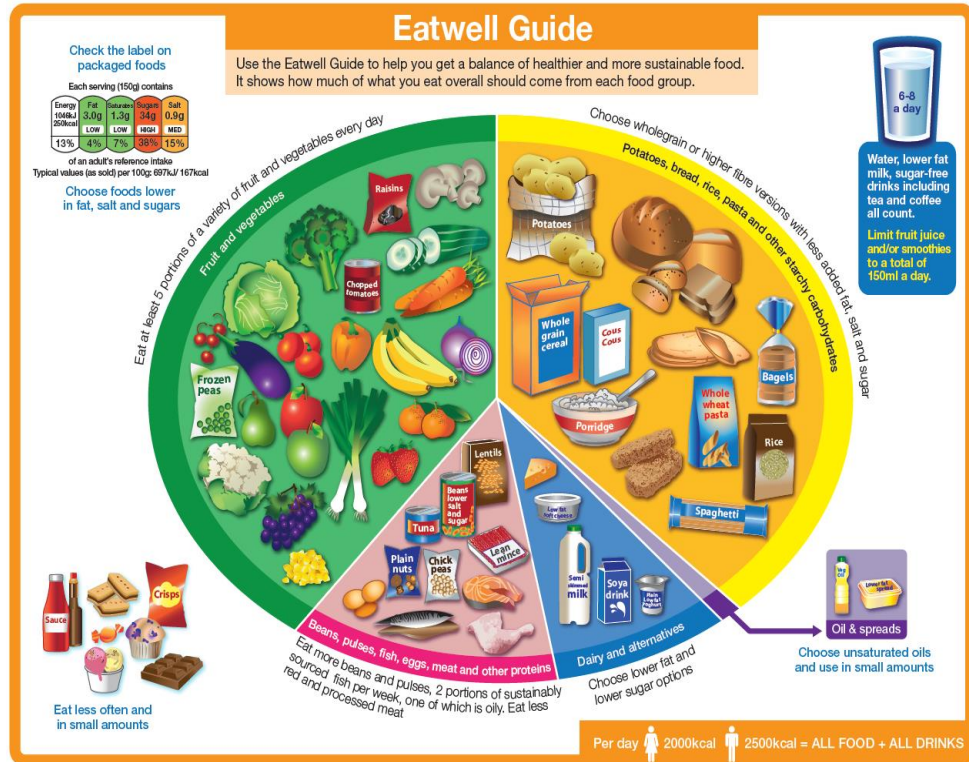
Healthy Bowels | For More Information

- [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)*

Healthy Weight

- Gaining or maintaining a healthy weight for your height can help with urinary incontinence symptoms
- Research shows that a 5% weight loss can significantly reduce stress urinary incontinence
- Your Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure that uses your height and weight to work out if your weight is healthy
- You can check your BMI here: [BMI Healthy Weight Calculator](#)
(opens in new window)

Healthy Weight



- There are lots of resources available that can help with healthy eating and weight loss, including:
- [The Eatwell Guide](#) (*opens in new window*)
- [The NHS Weight Loss Plan](#) (*opens in new window*)

Stop Smoking



- Research shows smokers are more than twice as likely to have stress incontinence compared to non-smokers
- Smoking causes a chronic cough that causes pressure on the pelvic floor muscles
- Research shows you are **4 times more likely to stop** with the help of dedicated NHS stop smoking services
- For information about local support see: www.helpmequit.wales (opens in new window) or phone 0808 2786119

Stopping Smoking is the most important thing that you can do for your health

Exercise



Keeping or becoming more active has great health benefits

It has been shown to help to:

- Improve Sleep
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Manage stress
- Improve quality of life



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Physical Activity For Adults & Older Adults



The chart on the left shows the exercise recommendations for adults and older adults

(UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines 2019)



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Physical Activity and Urinary Incontinence

- If you experience bladder leakage when you exercise, try to find types of activity that don't cause or increase your symptoms
- Start to work on your pelvic floor exercises and any relevant lifestyle changes to help manage your bladder symptoms
- Gradually build up what exercise you are doing as your symptoms improve
- It may be useful to initially reduce any high impact exercise
 - e.g. temporarily swap running for brisk walking
- Then gradually build up the impact as your symptoms improve
- There are vaginal devices that may reduce leakage during exercise
 - Speak to a pelvic health physiotherapist for information about these

Comfortable Sexual Intercourse

- Sex should be enjoyable and not painful
- Pain or discomfort during sex can be caused by many factors * that include
 - Pelvic floor muscle tension
 - Vaginal dryness (this is most likely to start around the time of the menopause or after having a baby, particularly if breastfeeding)
- Vaginal dryness during sex can be eased by using a natural, unscented lubricant
- If using condoms, only use a water-based lubricant (NOT oil-based)
- Avoid washing the genital area with scented products

**Speak to your GP if you are unsure of the cause*



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Comfortable Intercourse | For More Information

- [Why Does Sex Hurt?](#) *(opens in new window)*
- [Care of Vulval Skin](#) *(opens in new window)*
- [ABUHB Pain with Intercourse](#) *(opens in new window)*

If symptoms persist, speak to your GP as there may be alternative treatment options

Are you Concerned? | When & How to Ask for Help

- Physiotherapy can help in the management of urinary and faecal urgency and incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse, painful intercourse and persistent pelvic pain
- If you have any symptoms that are bothersome, speak to your doctor, nurse or another healthcare professional and request a pelvic health physiotherapy referral
- You will then be contacted and an appointment will be arranged for you to speak to a female pelvic health physiotherapist for a 1 to 1 assessment and treatment plan

Key Points to Remember

- Urinary incontinence is **common** but **not normal**
- Regular pelvic floor exercises can cure or improve leakage
- The exercises need to be done -
 - The right way (the correct technique)
 - Often enough (3 times a day)
 - For long enough (at least 3 months)
- Healthy lifestyle changes can also help
- If you need further advice or treatment ask to be referred to a pelvic health physiotherapist

Test Yourself...

1. How do pelvic floor exercises help to reduce urinary incontinence symptoms?
2. How often do you have to do pelvic floor exercises?
3. Apart from pelvic floor exercises, what else can you do to reduce your bladder symptoms?
4. What can you do to make your bladder habits healthy?

Answers

1. Stronger pelvic floor muscles will give your bladder and pelvic organs more support, helping you to control your bladder with activities such as coughing, sneezing and jumping and helping you to make it to the toilet without leaking before you get there
2. It is recommended that you do pelvic floor exercises 3 x daily for at least 3 months to notice any benefits. Once your symptoms have improved to a level you are happy with, you can reduce the exercises to once a day
3. Drink 1.5-2 litres of fluids daily, avoid bladder irritants such as cigarettes, caffeine, alcohol, fizzy/sweetened drinks, maintain a healthy weight, avoid straining to empty your bowels
4. Drink 1.5- 2litres daily, avoid bladder irritants (see above), aim to pass urine 3-4 hourly; avoid going for a wee 'just in case'