

If you have any questions, ask your healthcare clinician.

Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

This brochure will guide you as you start your pelvic floor muscle exercise program. These exercises may improve some urinary problems by:

- Strengthening the pelvic muscles
- Calming the bladder
- Improving bladder support
- Releasing pelvic floor tension or spasms

They can help both men and women who have:

- Stress incontinence (urine leaks when you cough or sneeze)
- Urge incontinence (urine leaks when you feel the urge to urinate)
- The feeling of urinary frequency (having to urinate often)
- The feeling of urinary urgency (having to urinate right away)
- Pelvic pressure or pain

Clinicians may suggest these exercises before and after certain types of surgery and for new mothers after giving birth.

The pelvic floor

The pelvic floor muscles surround the urethra and rectum (Figures 1 and 2). They also surround the vagina. As the bladder fills with urine, the pelvic floor muscles help keep the urine in the bladder and prevent leaks. The muscles relax during normal urination and allow urine to flow freely.

Figure 1. Female pelvic floor

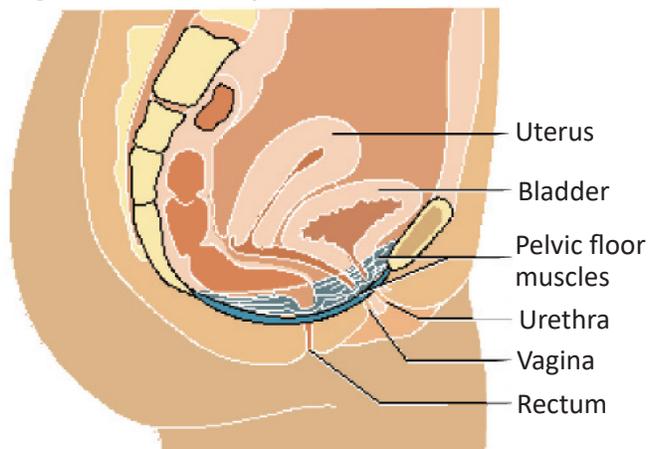
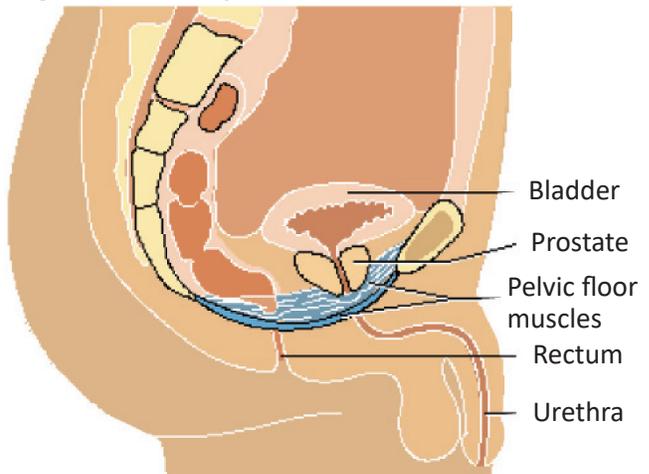


Figure 2. Male pelvic floor



Pelvic floor contraction exercise

A pelvic floor contraction is a small movement of the pelvic floor muscles. You can feel this group of muscles by simply tensing the ring of muscles around the rectum (women may feel the contraction vaginally).

It is important to contract only the pelvic floor muscles. The abdomen, buttocks and thighs must stay relaxed. Place your hand on your abdomen while doing the exercises. Aside from normal breathing, your abdomen should not move when you contract your pelvic floor muscles. Contracting the abdomen pushes the bladder. This causes more pressure, leading to leaks or increased urgency.

There are 2 types of pelvic floor exercises:

- **Quick pelvic floor contractions** – Tighten your pelvic floor muscles quickly (a “wink” of the rectum). This should be a quick, powerful contraction. Relax the muscles completely after each contraction.
- **Slow (sustained) pelvic floor contractions** – Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold for 3 to 10 seconds, as instructed. Then, relax for 3 to 10 seconds.

Helpful tips

- Stopping the flow of urine during urination is a way of doing a pelvic floor contraction. It can be helpful to do this once in a while to make sure you are using the right muscles. However, do not do this on a regular basis. This works against your bladder’s normal contraction and release of urine. Do not do the exercises while emptying your bladder.
- Men may be able to identify a pelvic floor contraction. If a man does the exercise correctly while standing naked, the tip of the penis will pull slightly in and up.
- Women who are sexually active can contract their pelvic floor around their partner’s penis, and their partner should feel the contraction. This is another way of knowing if pelvic floor muscles are contracting.

Exercise program guidelines

Include both quick and slow pelvic floor contractions in your exercise program. The quick contractions build muscle strength. The slow contractions build stamina. Each type of exercise targets and works specific nerves in your pelvic floor. Your exercise program will depend on your strength and ability to contract your pelvic floor. Be patient. It is important not to overwork and tire your muscles. For best results, do these exercises, as instructed, every day.

Daily exercises

- Start with 10 repetitions of the quick contractions and 10 repetitions of the slow contractions. Do each of these sets 4 times a day.
- Every week or 2, increase the number of repetitions in a set by 5 (15, 20, 25) until you have reached 30 repetitions per set of quick and slow contractions. (This will be a total of 120 repetitions of the quick contractions and 120 repetitions of the slow contractions in a day.)

If you have stress incontinence, tighten your pelvic floor at these times:

- When you feel a cough or sneeze coming
- When you laugh
- Before you stand up
- Before lifting objects or doing heavy activity

If you have urgency or urge incontinence, try to do a few contractions to distract yourself until you can get to the bathroom. Remember, relaxing the pelvic floor completely after each contraction may be helpful. Your body can send false urge signals at times.

For the best results, do these exercises every day for 3 to 4 months. It takes time to build up muscle strength.

If you have any questions, ask your physician, nurse or physical therapist.