Pelvic Floor Exercises
Information for patients, relatives and carers

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pelvic Floor Muscles - where are they</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelvic Floor Muscles weakness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can exercises help?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to do the exercises</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelvic Floor exercises</td>
<td>7-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things to remember</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips for a healthy bladder and bowel</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pelvic Floor Muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are attached to the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis and the coccyx at the back of the pelvis/base of the spine forming a platform of muscle in between the legs.

The pelvic floor muscles help to support the bladder, bowel and uterus. They also help to improve sexual satisfaction.
Weak Pelvic Floor Muscles

Weak pelvic floor muscles can lead to:

- Urinary Incontinence – on coughing/laughing/sneezing or during sporting activity
- Poor wind and bowel control
- Poor sexual satisfaction or leaking urine during intercourse
- Reduced support and pelvic organ prolapse – pelvic discomfort or a feeling of ‘something coming down’/sensation of a vaginal lump
- A feeling of ‘urgency’ to empty your bladder and sometimes leaking of urine with the urgency
Why does the pelvic floor become weak?

- Childbirth – regardless of how your baby was born
- Constipation – straining to empty the bowels
- Repeated heavy lifting
- Menopausal changes (reduction in the hormone oestrogen)
- Being overweight – puts extra strain on your pelvic floor
- Chronic cough
- Being generally unfit
- Following a period of inactivity e.g. through illness, surgery
How can exercises help?

Your physiotherapy treatment should help you to become more aware of your pelvic floor muscles, improve strength where they are weak and improve function.

The aim is to exercise these muscles to make them bulkier and stronger so they provide better and stronger support to the pelvic organs and speed up the reaction of the muscles. This gives you improved bladder, wind and bowel control.

Like any other muscle in the body the more you use them the stronger the muscle will be.

There are no known risks to pelvic floor exercises.

Learning to do the exercises

Begin by sitting down, lying down or standing with your knees apart. Focus on your pelvic floor muscles by squeezing at the back passage as if trying to stop the passage of wind, then squeeze forwards and up as if trying to stop the passage of urine. Aim to achieve YOUR maximum squeeze. Do not hold your breath or bring your knees together. You may feel some tightening in your lower abdominal muscles – this is normal.
Practicing your exercises – Exercise 1

Squeeze and ‘pull up’ as hard as you can

Hold tightened for ............ seconds, then relax for ............ seconds to allow the muscle to recover

Repeat at least ............ Times

As the muscles get stronger you will find that you can hold for longer and do more repetitions.

Exercise 2

Squeeze and ‘pull up’ as quickly and tightly as you can and then relax

Then ‘pull up’ again

See how many times you can do this before you get tired

Try for ............quick ‘pull ups’

This exercise will also help with the control of wind
Exercise 3

To work on the ‘endurance’ or ‘staying power’ of the muscles:

Squeeze and ‘pull up’ gently, squeezing the muscles to half their maximum squeeze

See how long you can hold this for. Aim to hold for at least 20 seconds

This exercise will help to control bladder or bowel urgency and give you more time to reach the toilet

Carry out these exercises 4 – 6 times every day

To help you to remember to carry out the exercises every day you can link them with a regular activity such as watching a TV programme, having a bath or when you have a drink.

Get into the habit of using the muscles when you need them. Squeeze and ‘pull up’ if you are about to cough or sneeze, pass wind, feel bladder or bowel urgency and prior to lifting.

This will also help with bladder, bowel and wind control.
Remember

Exercises are for life. Once you have improved your pelvic floor strength, don’t forget to continue with the exercises.

DON’T hold your breath when contracting your muscles.

Watch your weight – excess weight puts extra strain on your muscles.

Keep motivated.

Try to include 30 minutes of general exercise; such as walking, swimming every day.
Tips for a healthy bladder and bowel

Avoid going to the toilet ‘just in case’. Only go when your bladder feels full but don’t leave it more than 4 hours during the day.

Try not to empty your bladder too frequently as this can reduce its capacity. If you need to go more than every two hours try exercise three on this leaflet, sit on something hard or try to distract yourself by doing something else e.g. count backwards from 100.

Aim to drink 1½ - 2 litres (three to four pints) of fluid per day

Avoid fluid that may irritate your bladder – tea, coffee, coke, fizzy drinks, acidic drinks
Tell us what you think

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Deborah Plowman, Physiotherapy, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 726204.

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