Pelvic Floor Exercises
Information for patients, relatives and carers

ℹ️ For more information, please contact:
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Caring with pride
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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 and improve their strength.

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

In sitting, standing or lying, focus on your pelvic floor muscles by squeezing at the back as if trying to stop wind and squeezing forwards and up as if imagining stopping the flow of urine. Try not to hold your breath, clench your buttocks or bring your knees together.
Practicing your pelvic floor exercises

Exercise 1 – Slow squeeze
Squeeze, ‘pull up’ and hold.

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

Repeat ……………….. times.

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

Exercise 2 – Fast squeeze
Squeeze and ‘pull up’ quickly and then relax and repeat.

Try for ……………quick squeezes’.

This exercise will also help with the control of wind.

Carry out these exercises three 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 or cleaning your teeth etc.
Exercise 3 – ‘The knack’

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

This will help to strengthen your muscles and also speed up the reaction of the muscles improving 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.

Do not 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 four hours during the day.

Try not to empty your bladder too frequently as this can reduce its capacity. Try not to go more than once every two hours. You can try sitting on something firm, crossing your legs or try to distract yourself by doing something else e.g. count backwards from 100.

Aim to drink one and half to two litres (three to four pints) of fluid per day.

Avoid fluid that may irritate your bladder – tea, coffee, coke, fizzy drinks, acidic drinks – for example fresh orange/apple/grapefruit/cranberry juice.

A balanced diet including a mix of fibre will help to improve your bowel pattern and stool consistency.
Healthy bowel emptying position

a) Knees higher than hips.

b) Lean forwards with elbows on knees.

c) Allow your tummy to bulge.

d) Focus on breathing out as if steaming up a mirror or blowing out candles. Avoid holding your breath.

Squeeze and ‘pull up’ your pelvic floor, especially around the back passage, after emptying your bowel and before you wipe.
Tell us what you think of this leaflet

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 725389/725390.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

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PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.
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