

Pelvic Floor Exercises - Female

What is the pelvic floor ?

The pelvic floor is a complex layer of muscles and ligaments positioned at the base of your pelvis where you sit. It is a supportive hammock from the pubic bone at the front of your pelvis to the tailbone (coccyx) at the back (Figure 1).

The pelvic floor has three main functions:

- it supports your pelvic organs, especially when you are standing or straining
- it helps the water pipe (urethra) and the bowel passage (rectum and anal sphincter) stay closed when you cough, sneeze or strain
- it helps to heighten sexual awareness by tightening during intercourse

The pelvic floor muscles are of two types - slow twitch, which work constantly to maintain support and control and fast twitch, which contract quickly to prevent urinary leakage).

Why does the pelvic floor become weak?

The pelvic floor can be weakened in the process of ageing. In women however, this weakening is worsened by childbirth and menopause. Other factors such as obesity, smoking, pelvic surgery, heavy lifting, chronic constipation may also contribute to a weak pelvic floor.

What are the symptoms of a weak pelvic floor?

Symptoms of a weak pelvic floor include:

- Leakage of urine with increased pressure (lifting, sneezing, coughing) or when you have a strong urge to empty your bladder
- Lack of control over passing wind and or bowel movements

How can exercising the pelvic floor muscles help?

Like other muscles of your body, the more you use and exercise them, the stronger they become and stay. Exercising the pelvic floor will improve your bladder control and leakage of urine.

How do I find the pelvic floor muscles?

Whilst your pelvic floor muscles are not visible, they can be felt using the following steps

Sit comfortably on a chair with your knees slightly apart.

Try to lift and squeeze the ring of muscle around the anus or back passage as if you are trying to avoid passing wind. Try and feel the muscle move - you should notice that the skin around your back passage tightens without any movement in buttocks of legs

When emptying your bladder try to stop or slow the flow of urine once you have started. (Do not do this during the exercises but just to find your pelvic floor initially as this may cause problems with bladder emptying). You can also imagine you are doing this sitting in a chair too but may find it a little more difficult. You should be using a similar group of muscles to the previous exercises.

Do not tense your abdomen, squeeze your legs together, tighten your buttocks or hold your breath. If you can master this, most of the muscle contraction should be coming from the pelvic floor.

How do I perform the pelvic floor exercises?

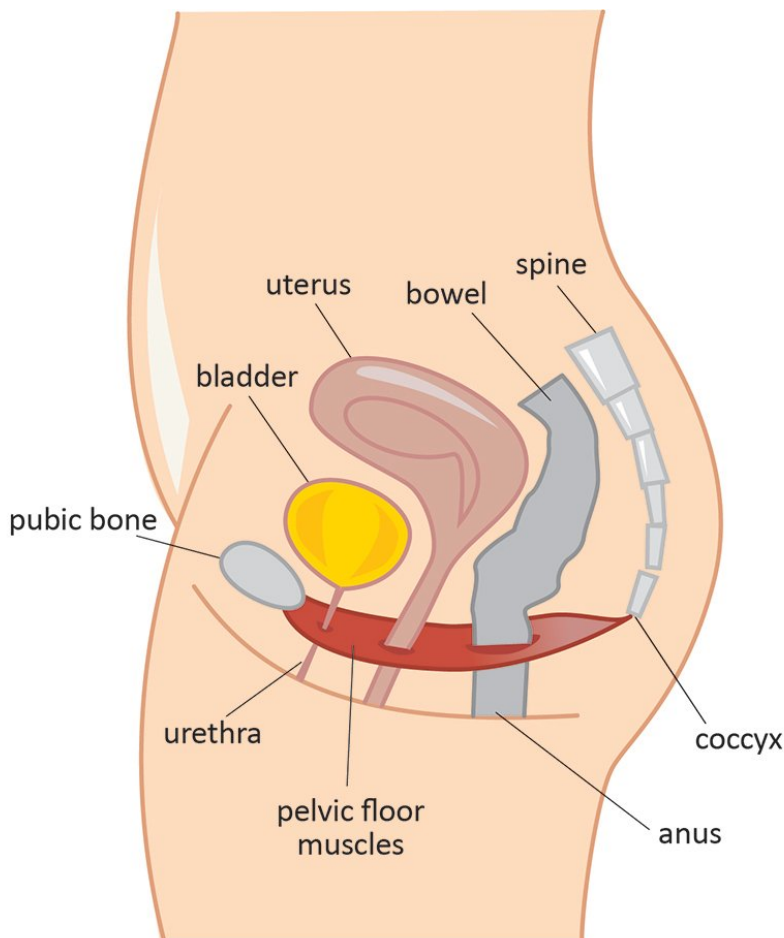
Once you have successfully located your pelvic floor muscles you can begin the exercise program by lifting and squeezing them without holding your breath, tensing the abdomen or tightening your buttocks or thighs. You need to develop both the types of muscles in your pelvic floor - slow twitch (which work constantly to maintain support and control) and fast twitch which contract quickly to prevent urinary leakage)

- **Practicing slow contractions**

- do the exercises and try to hold the pelvic floor tight for up to ten seconds. Rest for four seconds and then repeat the contraction as many times as you can, up to a maximum of ten

- **Practicing fast contractions**

- do the exercises and draw the pelvic floor rapidly upwards and hold this for one second. Repeat up to a maximum of ten times. This will protect you against sudden leakage during coughing, laughing or exercise



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