

## Pelvic Floor Exercises - Male

### 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 two 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

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 most significant factor for men is operations on the prostate gland such as radical prostatectomy for cancer or simple or endoscopic prostatectomy for benign enlargement. Other operations on your bowel, pelvic radiotherapy, pelvic nerve damage can also cause a weak pelvic floor. The pelvic floor can also be weakened in the process of ageing and factors such as obesity, smoking, pelvic surgery, heavy lifting, chronic constipation may also contribute.

### How can exercising the pelvic floor muscles help?

Pelvic floor exercises are an important part of preparation before surgery for removal of your prostate for cancer (radical prostatectomy). They ensure that the pelvic floor muscles are in good condition and can help reduce urine leakage after the operation.

### 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. Use a mirror so that you can see your lower abdomen - upper thigh. When you engage the pelvic floor muscles you should see a visible lift of your scrotum and a drawing inwards of your penis.

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 sneezing.

Try to make each contraction strong, slow and controlled.

Aim to do one set of slow contractions followed by one set of fast contractions up to three times a day. Do not over-do it or the muscles will get fatigued. The exercises can be performed standing, sitting or lying down but you may find it easier at first to do them sitting down.

It is important to get into the habit of doing them regularly to ensure the best results

If you are going to do an activity that might make you leak, try to do the exercises prior to this activity and monitor any improvement over time

## What else can I do to ensure the best results?

Other things that will help include

- losing weight if you are overweight or obese
- stop smoking and maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle
- avoiding constipation.

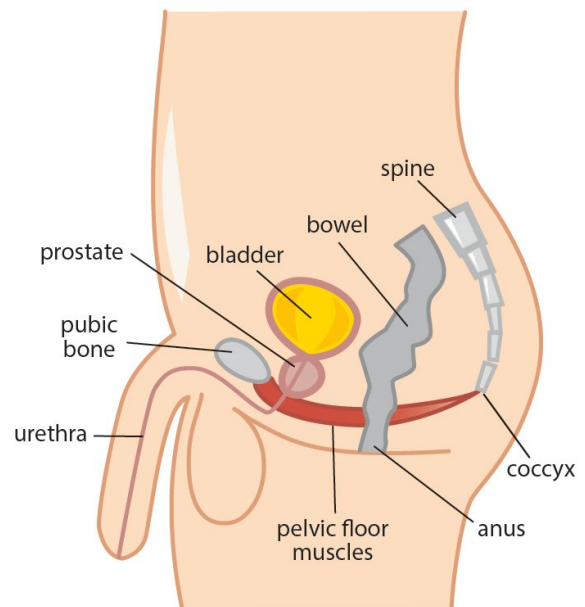
## Additional Contacts

National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66

Address: Suite 1, 407 Canterbury Road, Surrey Hills, VIC 3127

Telephone: 03 8692 8400

Email: [info@continence.org.au](mailto:info@continence.org.au)



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