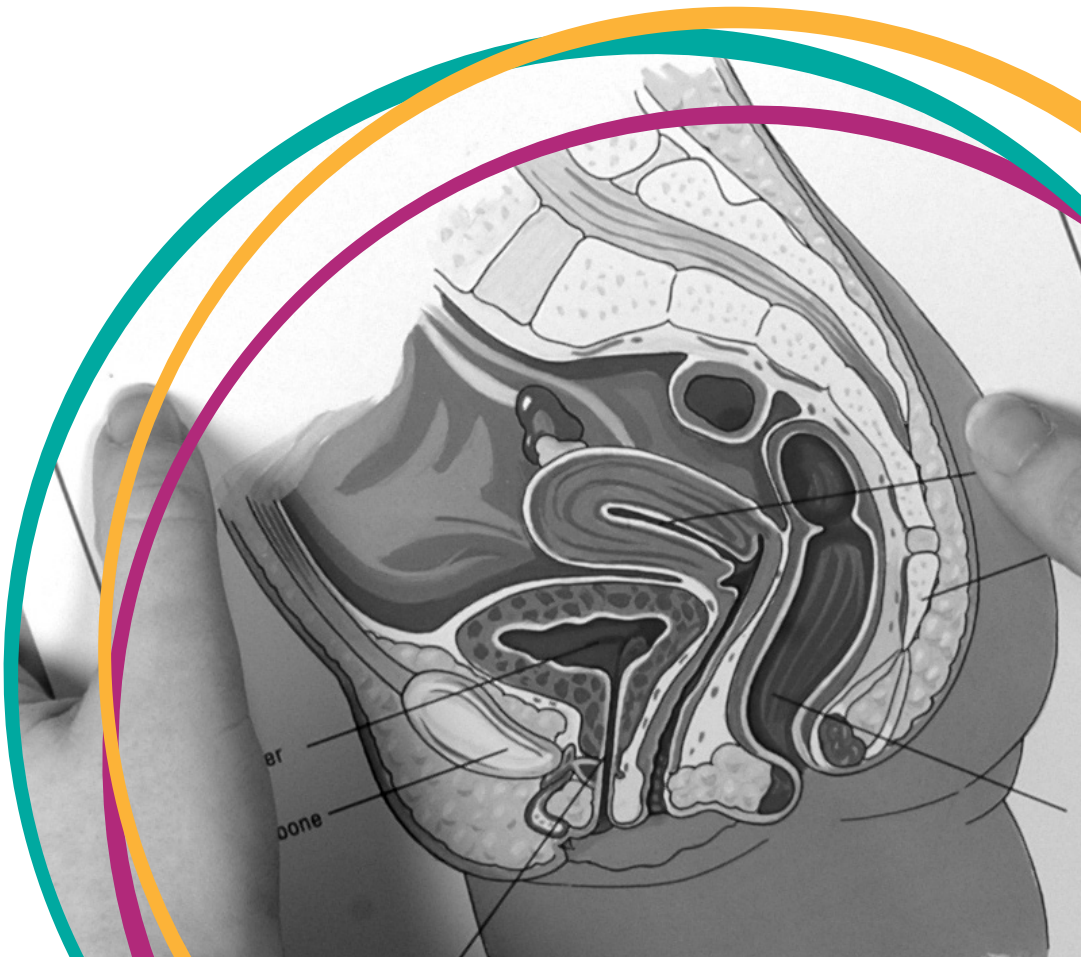


Pelvic floor exercises

Patient Information



Do you suffer from:

- Leakage of urine?
- Loss of control of wind?
- Symptoms of prolapse?

You are not alone... read on to find out how you can help yourself by learning about your pelvic floor.

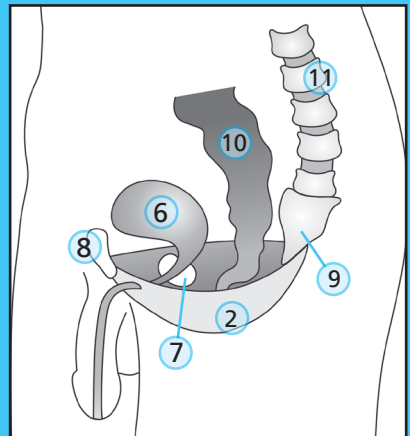
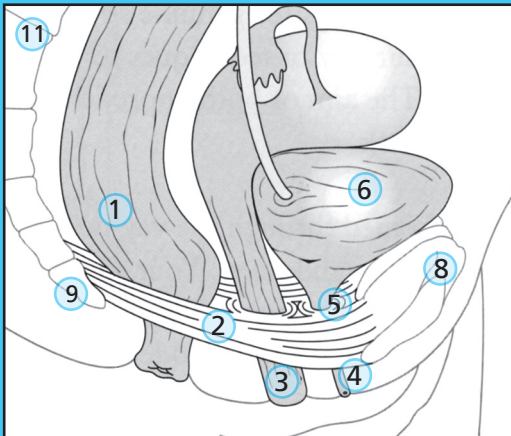
What is your pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is a hammock of muscles and other supportive tissues at the bottom of the pelvis. It forms a shelf on which your internal organs sit. Although internal it is quite near the outside and can be located and assessed via the vagina and anus.

Where is your pelvic floor?

It attaches to the side walls of the pelvic bones and wraps around the vagina and the anus in a figure of 8 formation.

When contracting these muscles they help bladder control by compressing the urethra (the tube you wee from) against the solid back of the pubic bone. They also close the anus along with the external anal sphincter (a ring of muscle around the back passage).



1. Back passage (rectum)
2. Pelvic floor muscles
3. Vagina
4. Urethra

5. Urethral sphincter
6. Bladder
7. Prostate
8. Pubic bone

9. Coccyx
10. Bowel
11. Backbone

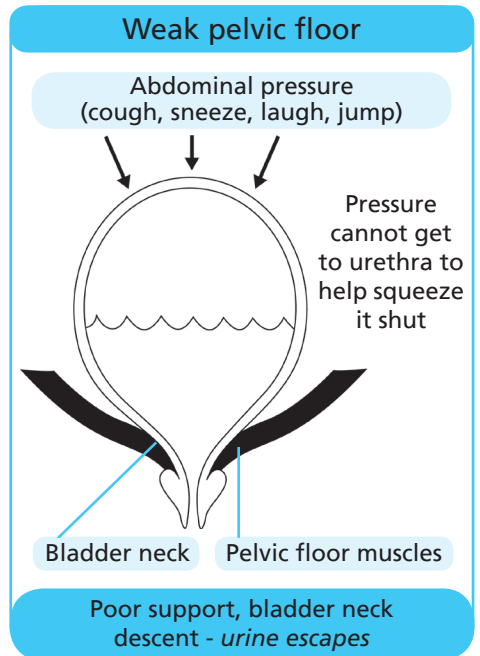
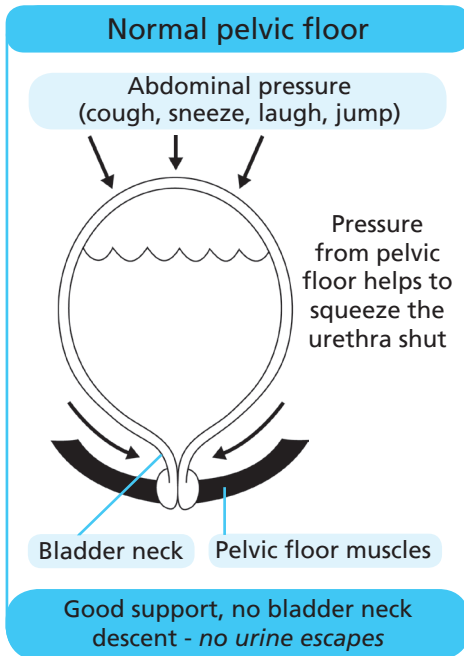
What do they do?

The function of the pelvic floor is to:

- Maintain continence of bladder and bowels
- Support the pelvic organs to help prevent descent or prolapse
- To enhance sexual activity
- To relax sufficiently to allow emptying of bladder and bowels
- To work together with the muscle of the bladder wall to prevent sudden urgency (or short warning) to wee
- In men, they enhance and prolong erection and help treat erectile dysfunction problems

What will make the pelvic floor muscles weaken?

- Childbirth (large babies, difficult or long deliveries)
- Loss of support due to hormonal changes
- Constipation and straining
- Chronic cough or sneezing
- Repetitive heavy lifting
- Lack of general fitness or periods of inactivity
- Being overweight
- In men, prostate surgery



How do I strengthen my pelvic floor muscles?

Sit, stand or lie comfortably with legs slightly apart and buttocks relaxed.

Women

Tighten the internal muscles around your front passage as if trying to stop a wee, and the muscles around your back passage as if trying to stop wind (it should feel like a squeeze and lift up inside your vagina).

Men

Tighten around your back passage as if trying to stop wind and squeeze as if trying to stop a wee (you may feel this as a lifting sensation at the base of your penis).

For endurance

Hold the squeeze aiming for 10 seconds, let go and feel a letting down sensation. Rest for 5 seconds, repeat 10 times. It may be hard at first to hold for 10 seconds and repeat 10 times, but start with what you can manage and gradually build it up.

For speed

Do a quick squeeze then let go immediately. Feel that your muscles have relaxed completely before repeating. Repeat up to 10 times.

How often?

These exercises need to be done at least 3 times a day but may need to be done more frequently if you can only manage a few at a time. It may be 3-6 months after you started your exercises before you notice an improvement in your symptoms.

Do not:

- Hold your breath
- Clamp your thighs together
- Tense your buttocks
- Cross your legs

None of the above engages your pelvic floor muscles correctly.

The knack

It is also important to use your pelvic floor muscles throughout the day, whenever doing an activity that causes a rise in abdominal pressure, e.g. coughing, sneezing and lifting. This is called 'the knack'.

This will:

- Help to control stress incontinence
- Help with support for your pelvic organs

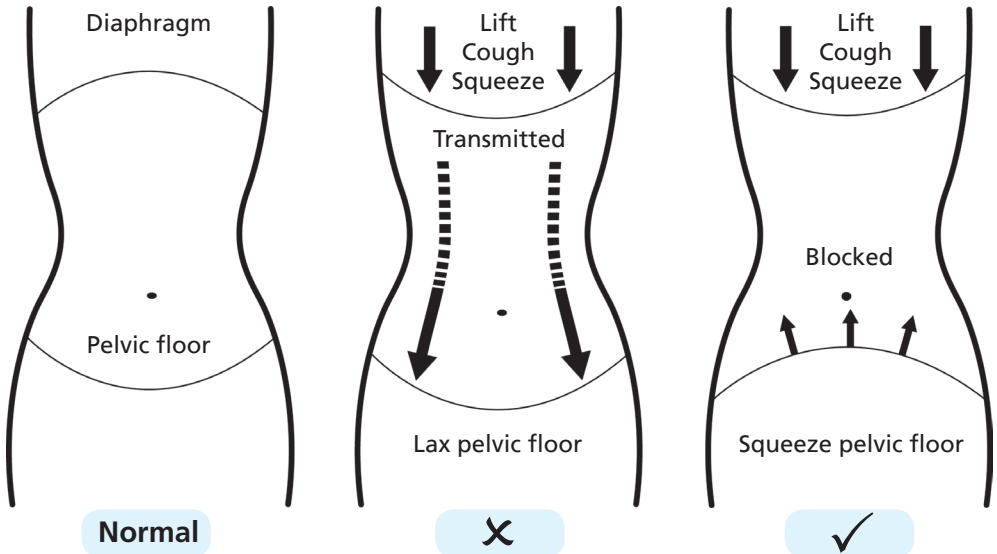
So remember to squeeze your pelvic floor muscles just before and during:

- Coughing and sneezing
- Lifting
- Laughing
- Changing position, e.g. standing up/sitting down
- Any sudden movement

Do not exercise by stopping and starting your flow of urine once started.

How to brace the pelvic floor during large rises in abdominal pressure

The abdominal cylinder is a dynamic structure, this is 'the knack' and how to control it.



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