



PROMOTING CONTINENCE CARE

Pelvic floor muscle exercises for women

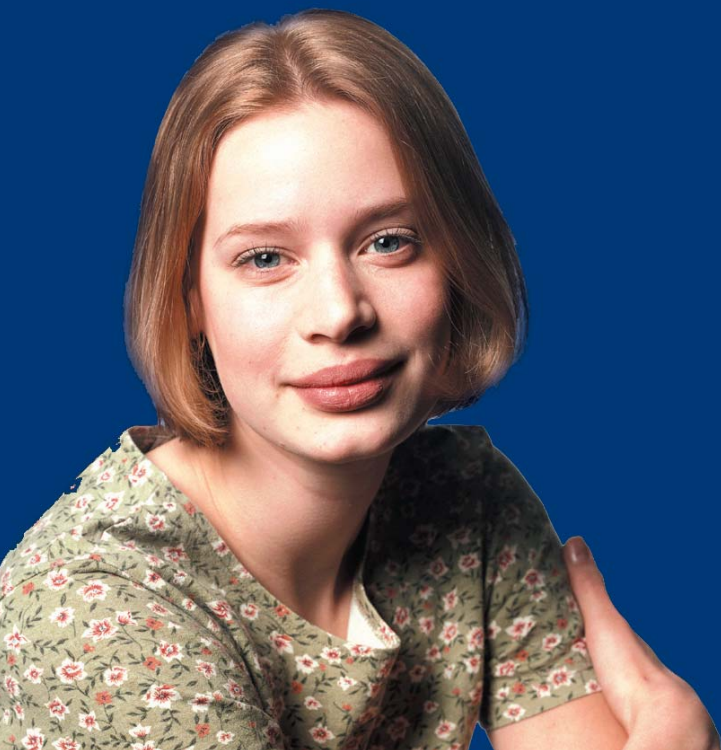


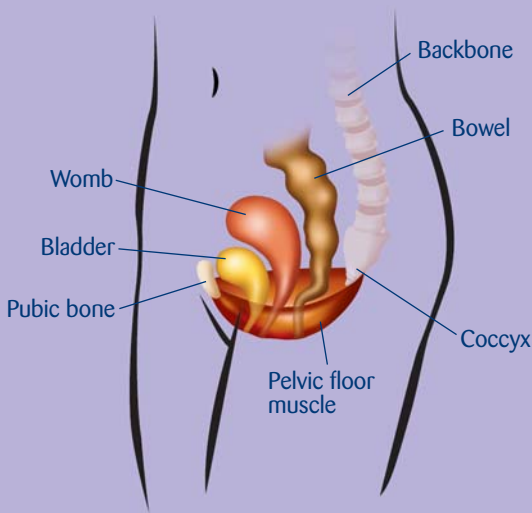
This leaflet has been approved by the Association for Continence Advice.

This leaflet has been designed to help you understand and effectively exercise your pelvic floor muscles.

Healthy pelvic floor muscles can help maintain good bladder and bowel function.

Young or old...





incontinence can be controlled.

The pelvic floor muscles are just inside your body between your legs.

They are attached between the bottom of your spine (coccyx) and the bone at the front (pubic bone). They support the bladder (where urine is stored), the uterus (womb) and the bowel.

These muscles help to control when you pass urine (wee) and empty your bowels (poo).

1 What do the pelvic floor muscles do?

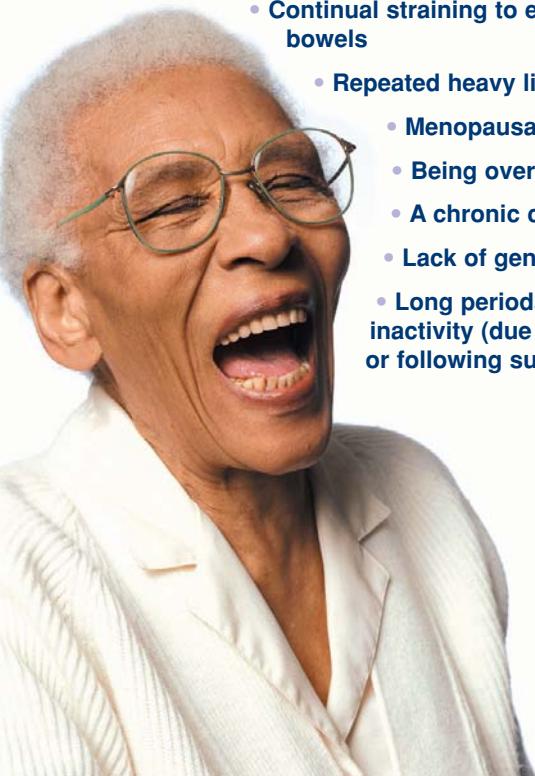
The muscles need to be firm and strong. If they are weak they will not provide the support and control that they should. You may leak urine in your underwear when you cough, sneeze, laugh, blow your nose, get up from a chair, exercise, lift, bend or stretch. Some people lose control of their bowel and leak wind or faeces (poo) in their underwear.

The bladder, womb and bowels are usually supported by the pelvic floor muscles. They may start to descend in the pelvis if these muscles are weak, this is called a prolapse.

Healthy pelvic floor muscles may also help to improve your sex life.

In women the pelvic floor muscles may become weakened in many ways for example:

- **Being pregnant**
- **After childbirth (especially after difficult vaginal deliveries)**
- **Continual straining to empty the bowels**
- **Repeated heavy lifting**
- **Menopausal changes**
- **Being overweight**
- **A chronic cough**
- **Lack of general fitness**
- **Long periods of inactivity (due to illness or following surgery).**



2 How to exercise the pelvic floor muscles

The first step to an effective exercise programme is to correctly identify the pelvic floor muscles. As these muscles are inside the body and we are not normally aware of using them, it is worth taking time to check that you are exercising them correctly.

Choose any comfortable position, with your knees slightly apart. Concentrate on the muscles that you would use to stop yourself from passing urine, and at the back as if you are trying to stop passing wind. When doing this, don't hold your breath.

It is easy to use the wrong muscles instead of the pelvic floor muscles.

3 How to check that you're doing the exercises properly

Put your thumb just inside your vagina facing towards the back. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the muscle move around your thumb.

When you are having sex, try to exercise your pelvic floor muscles. Ask your partner if they can feel your muscles tighten.

Check with a mirror. Hold a small mirror so that you can see the area between your legs. Tighten the pelvic floor muscles. The skin between the anus (back passage) and vagina should move away from the mirror.

WARNING!

Stopping your wee mid-stream should NOT be attempted. It may interfere with normal bladder function

If you are unable to feel a definite squeeze and lift action of your pelvic floor muscles, you should seek professional help; even women with very weak pelvic floor muscles can be taught these exercises by a specialist continence physiotherapist or continence advisor with expertise in this area.

When you have learnt these exercises, you can do them sitting, lying or standing.

Try to do both slow and fast exercises:

- **Slow exercises**

Gradually tighten the muscles and hold for as long as you can. Aim for 10 seconds.

- **Fast exercises**

Tighten and relax the muscles quickly - up to 10 times.

4 Your pelvic floor muscle exercise programme

How often and how many?

Build up to doing 10 slow exercises and 10 fast exercises 3 times each day.

A good time to do them is after you have emptied your bladder. Alternatively, link them with an activity you perform regularly such as after having a wee, whilst cleaning your teeth or waiting for the kettle to boil.

How will I know if I am getting better?

The muscles may get tired at first. It may be hard to hold for the full 10 seconds or repeat them 10 times.

The muscles will get stronger as you practise. Do as much as you can. Try to do a little more each time.

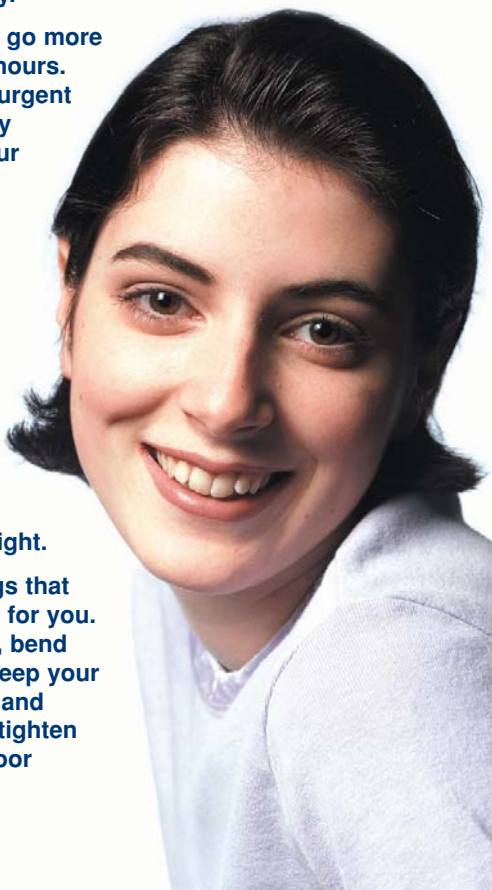
You would expect to have fewer leaks in your underwear after about 3 months of exercising. Seek professional help if there is no improvement after 3 months.

You may need to exercise for up to 6 months before you see a full improvement.

5 Look after your bladder and bowels

Try to live in a healthy way:

- **Avoid constipation by eating 5 portions of fibre every day. We get fibre from fruit, vegetables or wholemeal bread.**
- **Avoid tea, coffee and cola. These contain caffeine and may irritate the bladder.**
- **Avoid fizzy drinks and excessive alcohol - they can make you want to go to the toilet more often.**
- **It is healthy to empty your bladder between 4 and 6 times per day.**
- **Don't get into the habit of going to the toilet 'just in case'. Go only when you feel your bladder is full. You do still need to empty your bladder regularly, never leave it for more than 4 hours during the day.**
- **You shouldn't go more than every 2 hours. To put off an urgent need to go, try tightening your pelvic floor muscles, sitting on something hard or distracting your mind by thinking of something else.**
- **Try to avoid putting on excessive weight.**
- **Don't lift things that are too heavy for you. When you lift, bend your knees, keep your back straight and remember to tighten your pelvic floor muscles.**



National Organisations available for Information.

The Continence Resource Centre Helpline for Scotland
0141 201 1861

Continence Foundation Hotline
020 7831 9831

Incontact
020 7700 7035

Incontact provides information and support for people affected by bladder and bowel problems.

PromoCon
0161 834 2001

PromoCon offers impartial, unbiased information about continence products and services.

Your local continence advisor is:

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Produced by Synergy Healthcare as part of their commitment to promoting continence awareness.



This leaflet has been approved by the Association for Continence Advice.

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Certificate No: 096/93