

A Guide to the Pelvic Floor Muscles for Men

Information for patients

This information is a guide to be used alongside the advice and guidance given by the Physiotherapist.

Introduction

Many people may suffer from weakness of their pelvic floor muscles.

For men, common symptoms include:

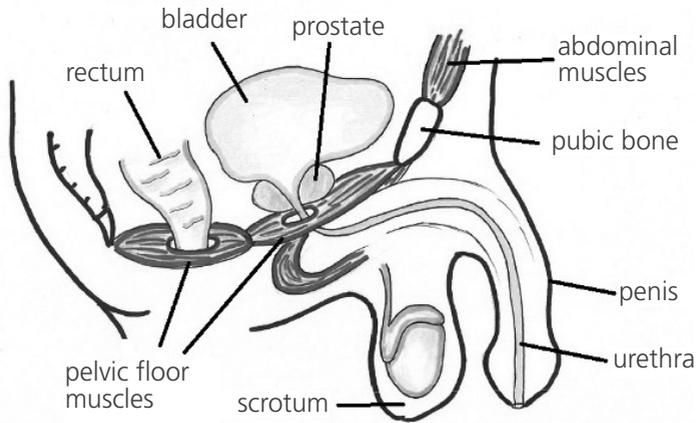
- Leaking urine with activity e.g. during running, jumping, coughing or sneezing.
- A sudden and urgent need to pass urine.
- Leaking stool or gas from the back passage.
- Erectile dysfunction (the pelvic floor helps you to maintain erections).

What do the pelvic floor muscles do?

The pelvic floor muscles are a sling of muscles stretching from the tailbone at the back to the pubic bone at the front.

They are responsible for:

- Supporting your pelvic organs – the bladder and bowel, especially when standing.
- A role in erectile function during intercourse.
- Controlling the passing of urine, faeces and gas motions.



Your pelvic floor muscles should contract when you cough, sneeze or laugh, preventing leakage of urine. The muscles should relax when you pass urine or open your bowels, and should then tighten again afterwards. This helps to control the passing of urine, bowel motions and also wind.

For optimal function the pelvic floor muscles should be able to tighten and lift up, be able to hold, and be able to fully relax and let go. The pelvic floor muscles can be strengthened just like any other weak muscle. They need to be regularly exercised to work well.

Factors leading to incontinence or weakness:

- Prostate surgery.
- Long term cough.
- Constipation/straining to empty your bowels.
- Being overweight.
- Pelvic trauma or related pelvic surgery.
- Repeated heavy lifting.

How to exercise your pelvic floor muscles:

First we need to “find the pelvic floor muscles”.

To do this, start in a comfortable position. Lying down may be easiest at first, but ideally we want to be able to perform the exercises in sitting and standing eventually.

- 1.** Imagine trying to stop yourself from passing wind – gently tighten and pull in the muscles around the back passage. Alternatively, you can visualise retracting the penis, or trying to stop yourself passing urine. You should feel the testicles lift and anus tighten. Now, relax and fully let go.
- 2.** A feeling of gentle tightening in your lower abdomen is normal, however try to avoid pulling, or “sucking in” your stomach muscles. Also try not to clench your buttock muscles or squeeze your legs together.
- 3.** Try not to hold your breath – it is important to be able to keep breathing throughout the exercise. It might help to first take a gentle breath in, and then to tighten the muscles as you breathe out.

How to develop a pelvic floor strengthening programme

Ideally, a pelvic floor exercise programme contains a combination of both endurance holds (where you keep squeezing the muscles for a number of seconds), and quick squeezes (where you squeeze and lift up the muscles, and then immediately relax and let go).

1. First, try to find your starting point with the endurance holds.

This exercise builds the endurance of the muscles, which will improve the support that the muscles are providing throughout the day.

Tighten and pull up the pelvic floor muscles, keep breathing and hold the squeeze for as long as you can, up to 10 seconds. If you start to feel the pelvic floor squeeze fading away, relax and let go at this point.

How many seconds could you hold for? _____ seconds.

Rest for 4 seconds, and then repeat your endurance hold. See how many repetitions you can do in a row, up to 10 (with a 4 second rest between each repetition). It is important that you feel the pelvic floor muscles relaxing and letting go after each squeeze. If you start to lose the feeling of the muscles letting go, this might mean that the muscles are fatiguing – stop at this point.

How many repetitions could you do? _____

So, for example, you might be able to hold for 6 seconds (then rest for 4 seconds), and do 8 repetitions – this forms the first part of your exercise programme.

2. Now, try the quick squeezes. On laughing, coughing and sneezing, your muscles need to be able to react quickly. It is important to practise these quick contractions. To do this, tighten and pull up the muscles quickly (make sure you don't tighten any other muscles!), then fully relax and let go. Rest for 1 to 2 seconds.

Repeat this – how many can you do in a row (up to 10)?
_____ repetitions.

Aim to do your exercise programme (both the endurance holds and quick squeezes) 3 times per day. Over time and as the exercises get easier, try to hold for longer and do more repetitions. 10 repetitions of a 10 second hold, plus 10 quick squeezes, is a good goal to work towards. Performing the exercises in upright positions such as sitting or standing is another good way to progress your exercise programme.

Self-Check tests

These self-check tests will help you identify whether you are engaging the right muscle to do the exercises.

- **Urine Flow Stop Test:** While passing urine, tighten your pelvic floor muscle to see if you can slow or stop your stream. Remember this action. You should then relax and finish emptying your bladder. **Remember, this is just a test to identify the pelvic floor muscles – don't perform this repeatedly as it may affect bladder emptying.**
- **Stand in front of the mirror:** If your technique is correct and you are engaging the right muscles, you should see and feel a dip at the base of the penis, and the scrotum move up slightly.
- **Feel/Touch:** You can also check if you are using the correct muscle by feeling the ridge of muscle between the scrotum and back passage. This is called the perineal area or perineum. When tightening the pelvic floor, you should feel the muscle lift away from your fingers.

Physiotherapy Assessment

If you have been referred to a Men's Health physiotherapist, you may be offered an assessment of your pelvic floor muscles by your physiotherapist. This assessment allows your physio to check if you are performing the exercises correctly, and give you feedback to improve your technique if needed. Your physio will also be able to explain to you how strong your muscles are, and help to develop your pelvic floor exercise programme.

The best way to assess the pelvic floor muscles is to perform a rectal examination. If your physiotherapist feels you would benefit from this assessment, they will fully explain this to you, and ask for your consent to complete the assessment. They will only perform the assessment if you are comfortable with this and give consent. You will be asked if you wish to have a chaperone present during your assessment.

Following assessment, your physiotherapist will give you a personalised exercise programme – this can be detailed below:

Endurance Holds: Tighten and lift up the pelvic floor muscles. Keep breathing and hold for _____ seconds. Now, relax and fully let go. Rest for _____ seconds.
Repeat this _____ times.

Quick Squeezes: Tighten and lift up the pelvic floor muscles, then fully relax and let go. Rest for _____ seconds.
Repeat this exercise _____ times.
Perform this routine _____ times per day.

Position(s) for exercise: _____

The most difficult part of the programme is remembering to do the exercises. Our top tips to help with this are:

- Download the NHS Squeezy App – see [squeezyapp.com](https://www.squeezyapp.com)
Note - you can put your own pelvic floor programme details into the App so that it is personalised.
- Put coloured sticky notes or dots in places that will catch your eye e.g. the fridge, kettle, next to your bed or on your watch.
- Set an alarm on your watch or phone.
- Do your pelvic floor exercises after you have emptied your bladder (but not whilst you are passing urine).

Further useful tips and advice

1. Maintain a healthy weight range

Maintaining the ideal weight range can make a big difference to your symptoms. If you are overweight, weight loss may improve symptoms of incontinence with your bladder or bowels.

2. Avoid constipation

Chronic constipation and straining to open your bowels can put pressure on the pelvic floor muscles and lead to weak muscles. It is important to drink plenty of water and maintain a healthy, varied diet. Your physiotherapist will discuss this further with you if this is relevant.

3. Drink adequate fluids

Aim to drink between 1.5 to 2 litres (3 to 4 pints) of fluid per day. For some men, drinks with caffeine (e.g. tea, coffee, green tea, hot chocolate or energy drinks), or fizzy drinks, may irritate the bladder. It can be helpful to try to reduce your intake of these drinks over a period of 3 to 4 weeks. For example, you might try switching to fruit teas or decaffeinated drinks. Gradually make any changes, and ensure that you do not restrict your fluid intake. Try to keep your fluid intake steady over the day.

4. Lifting

Heavy lifting may impact symptoms of bladder and bowel leakage. Remember to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before and during any lifting, and try to avoid straining to lift heavier loads where possible.

5. “The Knack”

The Knack refers to tightening your pelvic floor muscles during certain activities - try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles just before and during coughing, sneezing, laughing and lifting.

6. Bladder emptying

Some men experience a few drops of urine loss after the main flow when emptying their bladder. If you experience this, try waiting for a few seconds at the end of urine flow followed by a strong tightening of the pelvic floor muscles, then relax again. Repeat this to make sure you have completely emptied. You can also try rocking the pelvis forwards and backwards to see if this helps empty a little more. Try not to push or strain to empty your bladder.

7. Bladder retraining

Good bladder habits include emptying your bladder 5 to 8 times in 24 hours. This usually means emptying your bladder every 2 to 4 hours. Passing volumes of 300 to 600mls is ideal. Some men may find that they are passing urine much more frequently, and are passing smaller volumes. Some may experience a sudden urge to pass urine and sometimes experience urine leaks before reaching the toilet. Your physiotherapist may discuss strategies to help retrain your bladder. For example, rather than rushing to the toilet when you get the urge, stop and breathe and try to stay calm. Try the following to help “calm” the urge to go:

- Curl or scrunch your toes up, or in standing go up and down onto your toes.
- Distract yourself by focussing on something else e.g. count backwards from 100 by 7's – try to count all the way back to zero.

- Tighten and pull up your pelvic floor muscles – try to hold for up to 10 seconds if you can.
- Apply pressure to the perineum (the area between the scrotum and back passage) e.g sit on a hard surface, or perch on the edge of an armchair.

If problems continue, you may need to seek further medical advice.

Your next physiotherapy appointment

Date:

Time:

Please get in touch with the number below if you are unable to come to this appointment, giving as much notice as possible.

The information contained in this leaflet is intended for educational use only and not for the diagnosis or treatment of a specific condition, which should only be undertaken by a qualified healthcare professional.

Further information

If you require any further information after reading this leaflet, please contact:

Your Physiotherapist:

Telephone: 01865 235 383

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist in Women's and Men's Health
January 2024
Review: January 2027
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



Making a difference across our hospitals

charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

