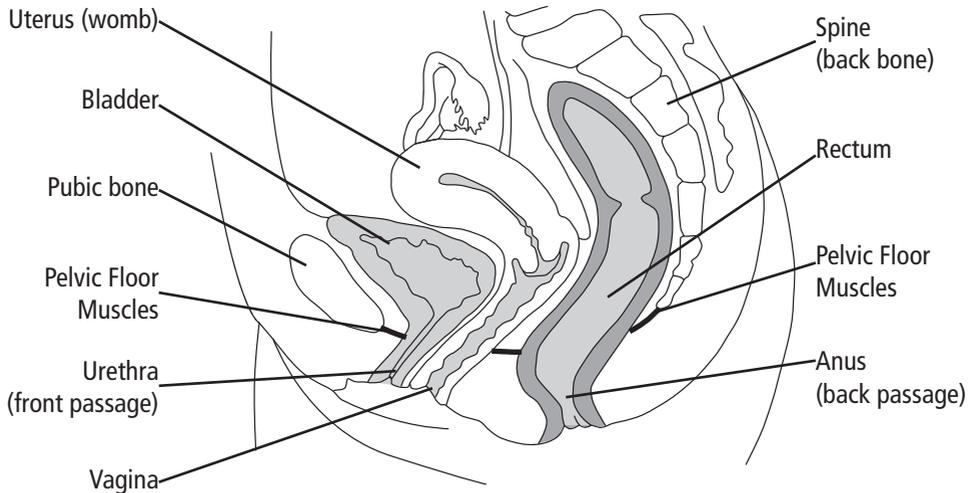


Pelvic floor exercises



What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is a sheet of muscle which forms the floor of the pelvis. It stretches from the pubic bone at the front of the body to the bottom of the back bone. It helps to support the bladder, womb and bowel, and also helps to control the bladder and bowel outlets.



Can the pelvic floor become weak?

Yes. Pelvic floor muscles may sag and weaken due to:

- childbirth
- constipation
- a chronic cough
- being overweight
- frequent heavy lifting
- changes caused by the menopause.

What symptoms are there?

Symptoms of weakness include:

- the urgent or frequent need to pass urine
- leaking urine when coughing
- changed sensation during intercourse.

What should I do if I have any of these symptoms?

Tell your GP or midwife. If appropriate, you may be referred to a Continence Physiotherapist.

Do I need to exercise?

Yes. Like any muscles, pelvic floor muscles need to be exercised to regain and maintain strength.

What exercises should I do?

Imagine that you are trying to stop your flow of urine midstream, at the same time as trying to stop yourself passing wind. The sensation is one of squeeze and lift. It is important not to tighten your buttocks or leg muscles and you must not hold your breath. Only the pelvic floor and deep stomach muscles should be working.

1. Tighten the pelvic floor and hold for as many seconds as you can, up to the count of 10. Release the contraction and relax for 4 seconds.

Repeat the exercise up to a maximum of 10 times. This exercise increases the stamina of your muscle. Gradually you will be able to hold the contraction for longer, and do more repetitions.

2. Tighten and relax the pelvic floor quickly, up to a maximum of 10. It is important that the muscle can react quickly when you cough or sneeze.

How often should I do the exercises?

You can exercise at any time. Nobody can tell you are doing pelvic exercises, so you can do them at any time, in any place. So, do them as many times as possible, at least 3 times a day.

Tighten your pelvic muscles before coughing, sneezing or lifting. This will improve your control and reduce leakage of urine.

How long will it take for the exercises to work?

It may take 6 months to achieve a good result, so persevere. When your pelvic muscles are strong, exercise twice a day for the rest of your life, to maintain their strength.

**If you have any questions, please contact your midwife (if appropriate)
or the Therapy department at Royal Cornwall Hospital
on 01872 252885 / 252601**

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

