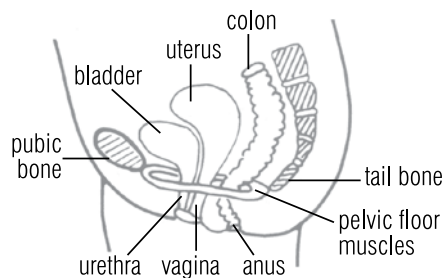




WHAT ARE THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES?

The floor of the pelvis is made up of layers of muscle and other tissues. These layers stretch like a hammock from the tailbone at the back, to the pubic bone in front.

A woman's pelvic floor muscles support her bladder, womb (uterus) and bowel (colon). The urine tube (front passage), the vagina and the back passage all pass through the pelvic floor muscles. Your pelvic floor muscles help you to control your bladder and bowel. They also help sexual function. It is vital to keep your pelvic floor muscles strong.



WHY SHOULD I DO PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE TRAINING?

Women of all ages need to have strong pelvic floor muscles.

Pelvic floor muscles can be made weaker by:

- not keeping them active;
- being pregnant and having babies;
- constipation;
- being overweight;
- heavy lifting;
- coughing that goes on for a long time (such as smoker's cough, bronchitis or asthma); and
- growing older.

Women with stress incontinence – that is, women who wet themselves when they cough, sneeze or are active – will find pelvic floor muscle training can help in getting over this problem.

For pregnant women, pelvic floor muscle training will help the body cope with the growing weight of the baby. Healthy, fit muscles before the baby is born will mend more easily after the birth.

After the birth of your baby, you should begin pelvic floor muscle training as soon as you can. Always try to “brace” your pelvic floor muscles (squeeze up and hold) each time before you cough, sneeze or lift the baby. This is called having “the knack”.



PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE TRAINING FOR WOMEN

As women grow older, the pelvic floor muscles need to stay strong because hormone changes after menopause can affect bladder control. As well as this, the pelvic floor muscles change and may get weak. A pelvic floor muscle training plan can help to lessen the effects of menopause on pelvic support and bladder control.

Pelvic floor muscle training may also help women who have the urgent need to pass urine more often (called urge incontinence).

WHERE ARE MY PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES?

The first thing to do is to find out which muscles you need to train.

1. Sit or lie down with the muscles of your thighs, buttocks and stomach relaxed.
2. Squeeze the ring of muscle around the back passage as if you are trying to stop passing wind. Now relax this muscle. Squeeze and let go a couple of times until you are sure you have found the right muscles. Try not to squeeze your buttocks.
3. When sitting on the toilet to empty your bladder, try to stop the stream of urine, then start it again. Do this to learn which muscles are the right ones to use – but only once a week. Your bladder may not empty the way it should if you stop and start your stream more often than that.

If you don't feel a distinct "squeeze and lift" of your pelvic floor muscles, or if you can't slow your stream of urine as talked about in Point 3, ask for help from your doctor, physiotherapist, or continence nurse. They will help you to get your pelvic floor muscles working right.

Women with very weak pelvic floor muscles can benefit from pelvic floor muscle training.

HOW DO I DO PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE TRAINING?

Now that you can feel the muscles working, you can:

- Squeeze and draw in the muscles around your back passage and your vagina at the same time. Lift them UP inside. You should have a sense of "lift" each time you squeeze your pelvic floor muscles. Try to hold them strong and tight as you count to 8. Now, let them go and relax. You should have a distinct feeling of "letting go".
- Repeat "squeeze and lift" and let go. It is best to rest for about 8 seconds in between each lift up of the muscles. If you can't hold for 8, just hold for as long as you can.
- Repeat this "squeeze and lift" as many times as you can, up to a limit of 8 to 12 squeezes.
- Try to do three sets of 8 to 12 squeezes each, with a rest in between.
- Do this whole training plan (three sets of 8 to 12 squeezes) each day while lying down, sitting or standing.



PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE TRAINING FOR WOMEN

While doing pelvic floor muscle training:

- keep breathing;
- only squeeze and lift;
- do NOT tighten your buttocks; and
- keep your thighs relaxed.

DO YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE TRAINING WELL

Fewer good squeezes are better than a lot of half hearted ones! If you are not sure that you are doing the squeezes right, or if you do not see a change in symptoms after 3 months, ask for help from your doctor, physiotherapist, or continence nurse.

MAKE THE TRAINING PART OF YOUR DAILY LIFE

Once you have learnt how to do pelvic floor muscle squeezes, you should do them often. Every day is best. You should give each set of squeezes your full focus. Make a regular time to do your pelvic floor muscle squeezes. This might be after going to the toilet, when having a drink, or when lying in bed.

Other things you can do to help your pelvic floor muscles:

- Use “the knack” - that is, always try to “brace” your pelvic floor muscles (by squeezing up and holding) each time before you cough, sneeze or lift anything.
- Share the lifting of heavy loads.
- Eat fruit and vegetables and drink 6 to 8 glasses of water daily.
- Don't strain when using your bowels.
- Ask your doctor about hay fever, asthma and bronchitis to ease sneezing and coughing.
- Keep your weight within the right range for your height and age.



PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE TRAINING FOR WOMEN

SEEK HELP

If you do nothing it won't go away. And it might get worse.

Every bladder or bowel control problem, no matter how small, needs to be looked after. There is almost always something that can be done to help.

Call Expert Advisors on the National Continence Helpline for free:

- information;
- advice; and
- leaflets.

On FREECALL 1800 33 00 66 (8 am to 8 pm Monday to Friday), or

Visit the website: www.bladderbowel.gov.au

* Calls from mobile telephones are charged at applicable rates.

