

**Therapy Services
Physiotherapy**

Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women

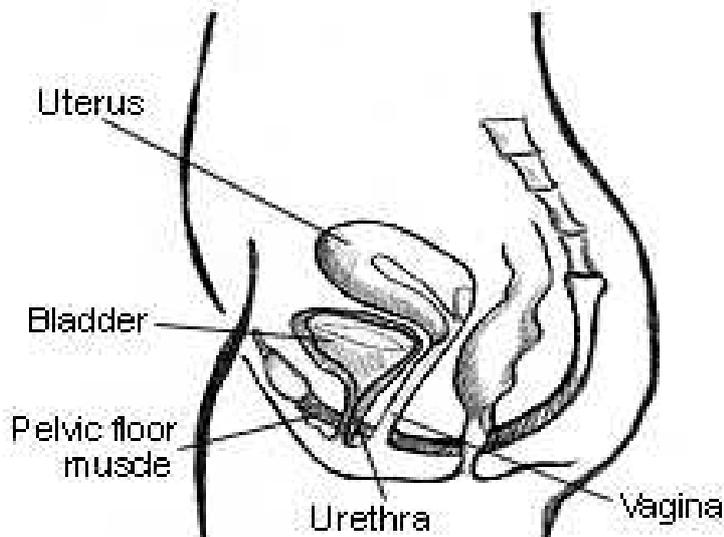
This booklet will provide you with information about pelvic floor exercises. These exercises are appropriate for all women except those who have had pelvic floor surgery in the past six weeks.

All women need to maintain the muscle tone of their pelvic floor throughout their life. These exercises are especially important during pregnancy and in the immediate post natal period. A strong pelvic floor can help to minimise any symptoms of urine leakage after delivery. Do these exercises daily.

If you have any problems doing these exercises, or you have continuing symptoms of urine leakage or reduced bowel control, seek advice from your GP, midwife, practice nurse, or physiotherapist.

Where are the pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor muscles are the firm supportive muscles that stretch from your pubic bone at the front of your pelvis to the base of your spine at the back. The pelvic floor muscles help to hold your bladder, womb and bowel in place, and to close your bladder outlet and back passage.



When your pelvic floor muscles are well toned they stop leakage of urine from your bladder and wind or faeces from the bowel. When you pass urine or stools the pelvic floor muscles relax and afterwards they tighten to restore control. They actively squeeze when you laugh or cough to avoid leaking.

What causes your pelvic floor muscles to weaken?

Like all muscles your pelvic floor can weaken and not work as effectively.

Some causes of weakness are:

- Lack of exercise
- Strain and stretching in childbirth
- Changing hormone levels in pregnancy and menopause
- Long term history of constipation
- Chronic cough or chest problems
- Being overweight
- Certain sports, for example, running and jogging
- Performing abdominal exercises incorrectly
- Incorrect lifting techniques

If your pelvic floor is weak it may not be able to stop leakage of urine, wind or stools from your bladder and bowel. This may occur when coughing, laughing or running. Strengthening your muscles by exercise can prevent this problem

How do I do pelvic floor exercises?

It is not always easy to find your pelvic floor muscles. Exercising them should not show at all 'on the outside'. It is important that you should not pull in your tummy, tighten your buttocks excessively, nor hold your breath

- Either sit comfortably upright with your feet touching the floor, legs slightly apart, or lie down with your knees bent and feet on the bed.
- Tighten and pull up the muscle around your anus and vagina. This squeezes the muscle upwards and inwards. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind, and at the same time stopping your flow of urine mid-stream.

When you are confident that you are doing these exercises correctly you will be able to do them whilst standing, lying or sitting. In fact, you can carry out the exercises anytime, anywhere.

How often should I exercise my pelvic floor muscles?

Your pelvic floor muscles need to have **stamina** so:

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, as described on the previous page.

- Hold tight for as long as you can, (up to ten seconds).
- **Rest for 4 seconds then repeat the exercise, up to ten times**

It is also important that your pelvic floor muscles are able to **react quickly** when, for example you cough, sneeze or laugh, so:

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as before, as quickly as you can, hold the contraction for one second before relaxing.
- Repeat this exercise up to 10 times.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you cough, sneeze or exercise to prevent leakage

Repeat both of these exercises 6 times per day for six months. This will enable your pelvic floor to get stronger and your muscles will be able to work harder for longer.

After six months you can maintain your pelvic floor strength by doing these exercises once a day, for the rest of your life.

Tips:

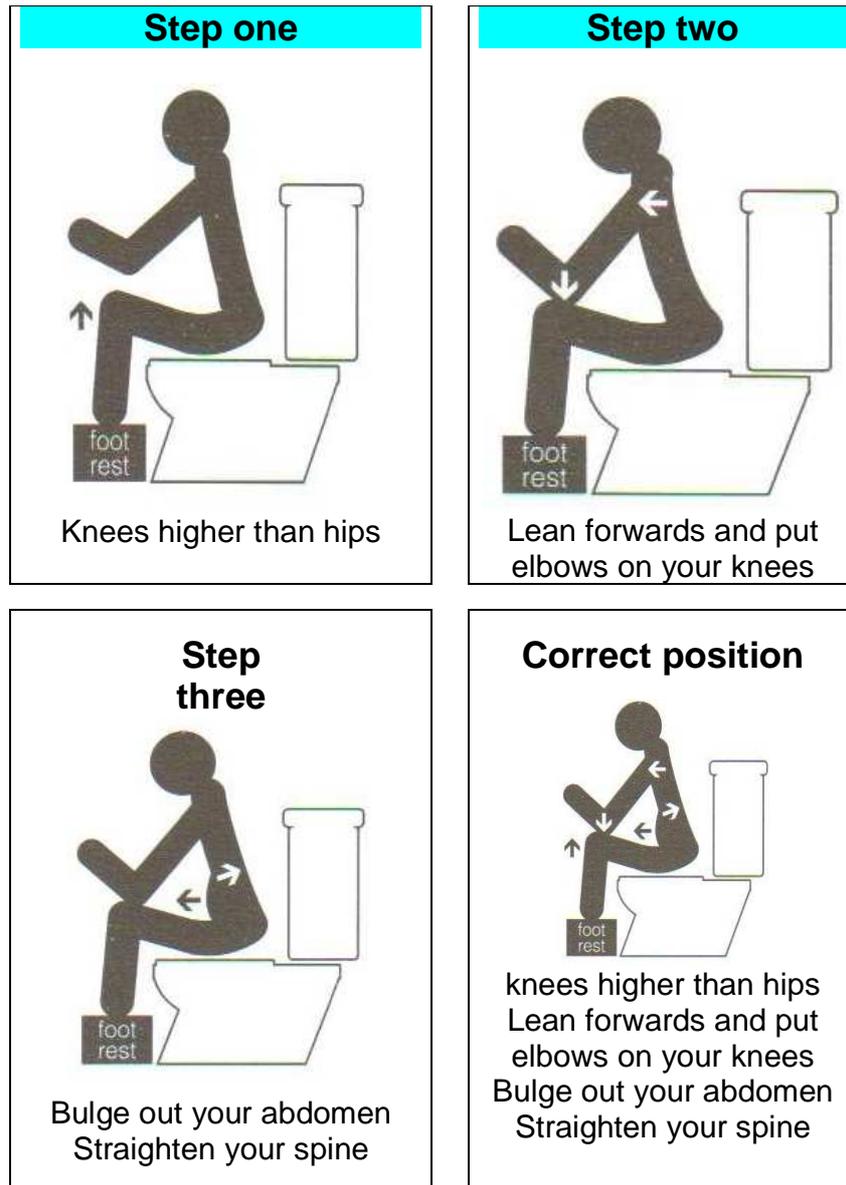
- Use 'triggers' through the day to remind you to do your exercises, for example, when feeding your baby, boiling the kettle, waiting at traffic lights, or whilst sitting on the bus.
- Tighten the pelvic floor muscles during exercising and before you cough, laugh, sneeze or lift anything heavy, to avoid strain
- Drink at least 8 cups of fluid per day. Avoid caffeine in tea, coffee, fizzy drinks and chocolate.
- Only go the toilet if your bladder is full. Do not get into the habit of going 'just in case'.
- Avoid constipation, straining to empty your bowels may make urinary and bowel symptoms worse
- Sit correctly on the toilet (see diagrams at the end of the leaflet).
- Remember prevention is better than cure

If you require any further help please contact;

Julie Ellis/ Emma Hargreaves - Women's Health Physiotherapists

0191 2825484 (9.00am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday)

Correct position for opening your bowels



Produced by: Emma Hargreaves/Julie Ellis
Clinical Specialist Physiotherapists
Revised: January 2013
Review Date: January 2016