

## Remembering to do your exercises!

The most difficult part of the programme is remembering to do the exercises. Try to trigger your memory by putting stickers on the telephone or fridge or by exercising **after** emptying your bladder.

## OTHER ADVICE

**Liquid intake:** You should drink approximately 3-4 pints of liquid a day. Do not restrict your intake, it will not reduce your symptoms – it could make matters worse. Avoid caffeine in drinks whenever possible.

**Sudden movements:** Try to tighten and hold the pelvic floor muscles prior to sneezing or coughing. This will improve your control and reduce leakage of urine.

**The bladder:** Although it is important to completely empty the bladder without straining each time you go to the toilet, try to avoid doing this too frequently as this can reduce capacity. If you need to pass water frequently, train your bladder to wait longer. When you feel the urge to empty your bladder try the following delaying techniques:

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles
- Sit on something hard, eg, a chair arm
- Distract your mind

## SOME COMMON QUESTIONS

**Does my weight have anything to do with my problem?**

Getting down to your correct weight reduces the strain placed on the muscles and can make a considerable improvement.

**When I am constipated my symptoms are worse. Why?**

Straining forces the bowels open and this stretches the pelvic floor muscles. Eat sufficient dietary fibre and ensure an adequate fluid intake. It can help to apply manual upward pressure to the area in front of your anus (back passage), while opening your bowels.

**I leak when picking up a heavy weight, can I do anything to stop this?**

Lifting puts a strain on the pelvic floor. Remember to tighten your pelvic floor before you lift and hold it tight until you have lowered the load.

**Are there any exercises I should avoid?**

Straight leg sit-ups and double leg lifts put severe pressure on the pelvic floor (and the back) and should not be done. Also avoid any activity with high impact (anything involving both feet off the ground at the same time).

**REMEMBER  
PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES  
ARE FOR LIFE!**

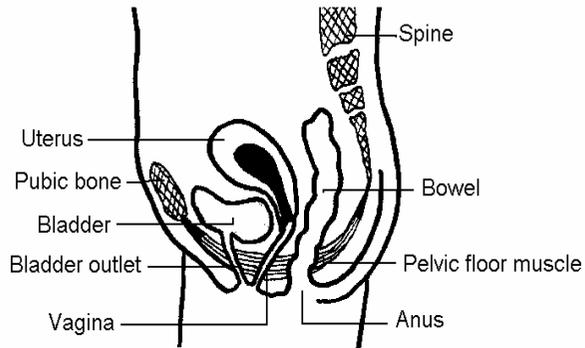
**If you have any problems or queries, please contact the Physiotherapy Department on: 01935 384358.**

# EXERCISES TO STRENGTHEN THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

*Physiotherapy Department*

## THE PELVIC FLOOR

The pelvic floor muscles form a broad sling, running from front to back and form the floor to the pelvis.



Their functions are:

- To support the pelvic organs, eg, bladder, womb and back passage.
- To control the outlets from the pelvic organs, eg, urethra, vagina and anus.

It is important to maintain their strength to prevent problems occurring or increase strength when problems do occur, eg, damage or weakness as a result of childbirth, constipation, chronic cough, being overweight, menopausal changes, persistent heavy lifting or long periods of inactivity.

## SYMPTOMS

These are varied, eg, urgent and/or frequent need to pass urine, leakage of urine when coughing, decreased satisfaction during intercourse or a feeling of heaviness/dragging down in the vagina.

## THE PELVIC FLOOR CONTRACTION

Start by breathing out, gently draw in the lower part of your stomach and then draw up the front and back passages. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind while trying to stop your flow of urine mid-stream. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing up the back and front passages. **Do not** squeeze your legs together or tighten your buttocks.

## THE EXERCISE PROGRAMME

*Please read the entire programme before beginning the exercises.*

### Endurance – Slow, Controlled Exercises

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as described. Hold tight for as many seconds as you can (up to a maximum of 10).

How long can you hold the contraction?

..... seconds

Release the contraction and rest for 4 seconds. Repeat the **tighten, hold and release** as many times as you can (up to a maximum of 10 repetitions).

How many times can you repeat the contraction? ..... repetitions

This is your **starting block**, eg, 2 seconds, 4 repetitions.

Repeat your starting block as many times as you can throughout the day – every hour if you can!

As a result of this muscle training your pelvic floor will get stronger and your starting block will change, eg, 4 seconds, 6 repetitions, building up the endurance of the muscles so they will be able to work harder, for longer.

### Speed – Short, Quick Exercises

It is also important that the muscles are able to react quickly when, for example, you cough or sneeze.

How many quick contractions can you do (ie tighten and release in quick succession)?

..... Repetitions

Aim to increase this number (up to a maximum of 10).

### Testing your Control

Occasionally, check to see how strong the muscles are becoming. Try halting the flow of urine mid-stream (but not if you have a urinary tract infection). It may take 3-6 months to achieve good results, but persevere, it will be worth it.

Once you have regained good control, test the muscles as follows:

- Ensure that your bladder is nearly full (about 3 hours after last empty)
- Stand feet apart, jump or bounce up and down on the spot, and cough deeply twice

Even if no leakage occurs, continue the exercise programme for another month. After that, continue to do the exercises 2/3 times a day for the rest of your life so that you will maintain strong pelvic floor muscles.