

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

The pelvic floor is a broad sling of muscle which holds your bladder, bowel and uterus (womb) in place, and prevents you leaking when you cough or sneeze.

During pregnancy, your pelvic floor muscles become stretched and weakened because they carry the weight of your baby as it grows. During delivery, the muscles get further stretched and weakened.

A weak pelvic floor can lead to many symptoms, including:

- urgent/frequent need to pass urine
- leakage of urine when coughing, etc
- decreased satisfaction during intercourse

The best way to improve a weak pelvic floor is to exercise it.

The exercises

Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine mid-stream. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift,' closing and drawing up the front and back passages. This is called a pelvic floor contraction and it is very subtle. Some people call it the 'secret exercise' as nobody around you can tell you are doing it. You therefore should not be holding your breath or tightening your buttocks as you contract your pelvic floor. So:

1. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold the contraction for as long as you can (your eventual target is to hold the contraction for 10 seconds). This is known as a slow contraction.
2. Release the contraction and relax for a few seconds.
3. Repeat the contraction as many times as you can with short rests in between, aiming to do 10 repetitions.
You then need to do some fast contractions, as follows >
4. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and relax (there is no hold with the short contractions). Repeat as many times as you can, ideally 10 repetitions.

When should I do the exercises?

Whenever you remember, about 4 –6 times a day. Many postnatal women find it convenient to do their pelvic floor exercises while feeding their baby.

How do I know that I'm doing it right?

Try halting your flow of urine mid-stream. Do this occasionally to check your progress.

How do I know the exercises are working?

When you have a full bladder, stand with your feet apart. Contract your pelvic floor and then cough. The less you leak, the stronger the muscle is becoming.