

Patient information

Pelvic floor exercises

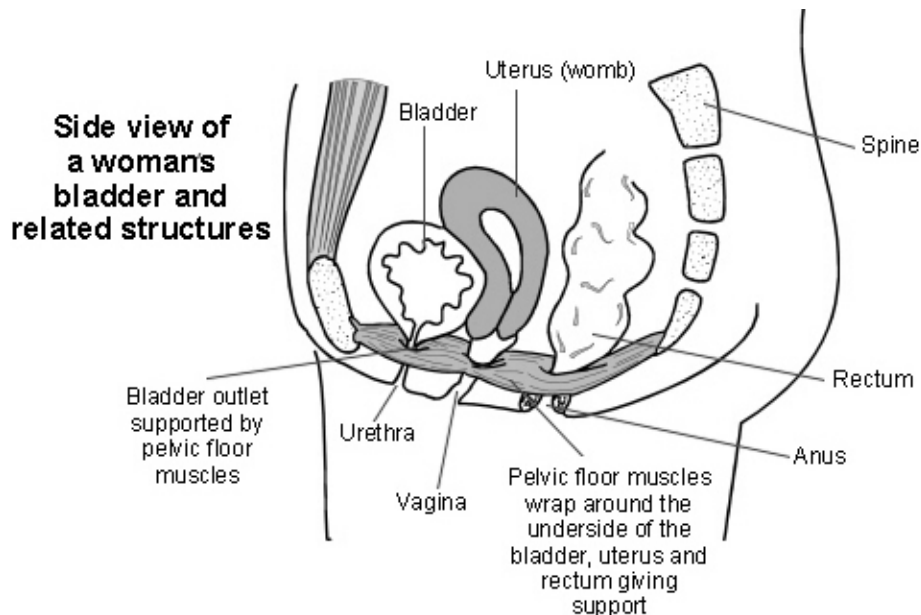
It is very important that you do your pelvic floor exercises throughout your pregnancy and continue to do them once your baby is born.

Pregnancy and childbirth can weaken the muscles of the pelvic floor. A weaker pelvic floor may mean that you have less control of your bladder and that you need to go to the toilet more frequently, with more urgency. You may also find that you leak urine when you cough or sneeze (this is called stress incontinence). Doing your pelvic floor exercises may help to prevent these things from happening. Doing your exercises regularly will help to keep your pelvic floor strong, but you may still experience some of these symptoms.

This leaflet explains what the pelvic floor muscle is, why it is important and how to do your exercises. If you are unsure how to do them after reading this information, then ask your midwife who will be able to explain them to you. If you are having any problems your midwife may refer you to the Women's Health Physiotherapist for an assessment.

Pelvic floor muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are a 'hammock' of muscles underneath your pelvis. They attach at the front of the pelvis to the pubic bone and span backwards to attach at the base of the spine around the sacrum and coccyx (tailbone). The opening of the bladder, birth canal (vagina) and the bowel all pass through the pelvic floor.



What does the pelvic floor do?

- The pelvic floor muscles are continually working to help support your pelvic organs and abdominal content (bladder, uterus in women and bowel) from underneath and stop them dropping down.
- The pelvic floor muscles help with bladder and bowel control. The pelvic floor muscles circle around the opening for the urethra, vagina and back passage and stop you leaking urine, wind or faeces. The muscles need to work harder when you cough or sneeze or on exertion to avoid leaking.
- The pelvic floor muscles have an important sexual function, helping to increase awareness for you and your partner during sexual intercourse.

Pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor muscles need to be exercised like any other weak muscles. A pelvic floor contraction is performed by closing and drawing up your front and back passage. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift'. In the beginning it may be easier to do the exercises lying, but you can progress them to sitting or standing. You can feel the correct muscles by placing your index finger or thumb into the vagina.

Do not:

- Pull in your stomach excessively

- Squeeze your legs together
- Tighten your buttocks
- Hold your breath.

There are two types of pelvic floor exercises you should do:

1. Quick and strong

Squeeze as hard as you can and then let go completely. Rest a second and then repeat. Aim to build up to 10 in a row. This exercise will help you to contract your muscles quickly when you laugh, cough etc.

2. Endurance

Perform a pelvic floor contraction and this time try to hold it for as long as possible. Try to build up to holding for 10 seconds. You must feel the muscle relax. Aim to repeat it as many times as you can, building up to a maximum of 10 times. Rest between each contraction for the same length of time you were able to hold it for. This exercise helps to prevent prolapsed and urge incontinence.

You must aim to do these exercises at **least 3 times a day**. Generally, it takes 3-6 months to get a muscle really strong again. Do not do so many that the muscle begins to ache; remember it is quality not quantity!

Other useful tips:

- Always tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you lift anything heavy, cough or sneeze
- Try to avoid constipation by eating sufficient dietary fibre and ensuring adequate fluid intake.
- Try to drink 1.5 - 2 litres of fluid a day.
- Try to avoid food and drinks which irritate the bladder. For example coffee, tea, hot chocolate, green tea, fizzy drinks and citrus drinks and fruit (oranges, lemons, grapefruit, limes and tangerines).

- Drinks which do NOT irritate the bladder include water, decaffeinated coffee and tea, herbal teas, milk shakes and diluted fruit juice.
- Do not get into the habit of going to the toilet every time you pass a toilet or 'just in case'. Going to the toilet too often may reduce the capacity of your bladder, which will mean that you end up going to the toilet more frequently. If you are drinking 1.5 - 2 litres of fluid in 24 hours, then you should aim to go to the toilet every 3 - 4 hours.

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo) <https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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