

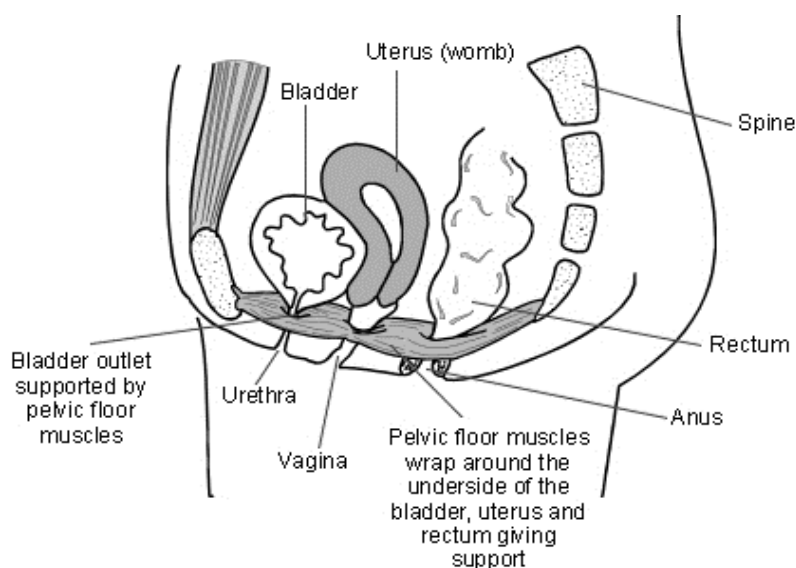
Patient information

Advice for Female Patient Suffering from Incontinence

Introduction

Many women suffer from stress incontinence. This occurs when the bladder leaks urine when put under sudden pressure eg coughing, sneezing, laughing, playing sport. Weak pelvic floor muscles are one of the main causes of this type of incontinence and many women are helped by following an exercise programme to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles.

The pelvic floor muscles form a broad muscular sling across the floor of the pelvis; they support the pelvic organs and control the outlets from them. Weakness of these muscles can be due to a number of factors including childbirth, a chronic cough, being overweight or constipation.



Exercising the Pelvic Floor Muscles

The muscles work by closing and drawing up the back and front passages.

Lift up and close your back passage as if stopping yourself passing wind, then tighten your vagina and finally lift up and close your front passage as if stopping the flow of urine. Hold the contraction while you slowly count to, then slowly relax the muscles.

Repeat this exercisetimes. Then rest for 1 minute. Now dofast contractions. Repeat 4 times a day.

You can do the exercises in different positions – lying, sitting or standing.

No one should notice whether or not you are doing your pelvic floor exercises. The movement is very localised. Do not use the buttocks or squeeze your thighs together. Do not hold your breath.

Test yourself

Make sure you are lifting up and squeezing in with your pelvic floor when doing the exercises by:

- Using a mirror to see your pelvic floor lift up.
- Put a finger on the skin between your anus and vagina and feel the pelvic floor lift up.
- While in the bath insert 2 fingers of the same hand into the vagina, separate them slightly and contract the pelvic floor to try and squeeze the fingers together.

Remember

Weak muscles tire easily. Practise a little and often, gradually increasing the time you can hold a contraction and the number of contractions you can do.

Hormonal changes around the time of a period can make the muscles feel weaker. Don't be disheartened, keep practising as usual.

Try to contract the pelvic floor muscles before coughing and sneezing. This will help to improve your control and reduce leaking.

Fluids

Try to drink between 1 and 2 litres of fluid a day. Restricting your fluid intake will not make you leak less and your bladder will be irritated by the small volume of strong urine which could make the problem worse.

Some women are very sensitive to caffeine. If you drink a lot of cola, coffee or tea try to stop drinking them for a few days to see if this helps you. Try to drink plenty of water.

Bladder Emptying

It is important to empty the bladder fully each time you go to the toilet, without straining. Small amounts of urine in the bladder can cause irritation. If you think you are not emptying your bladder completely, try rocking from side to side, forwards and backwards. Then relax your pelvic floor to see if you can pass any more urine.

Frequency

Try not to get into the habit of emptying your bladder frequently “just in case” as this can reduce its capacity. If you feel that you need to go to the toilet more than once every 2 to 3 hours, train your bladder to wait longer. When you feel the urge to empty your bladder, tighten your pelvic floor muscles, sit down and try to wait a few more minutes. This will encourage your bladder to hold more urine.

Things to Avoid:

Being overweight

This gives your muscles more work to do. Getting down to your correct weight can reduce your symptoms.

Constipation

Straining to open the bowels stretches the pelvic floor muscles and should be avoided.

Heavy lifting

This puts a strain on the pelvic floor so avoid repeated lifting if possible. If you need to lift something heavy remember to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you lift and hold them tight until you put down the load.

Strenuous tummy exercises

Double leg lifts and sit ups done badly put severe pressure on the pelvic floor muscles and should not be done.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the disabledgo website link below:

<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>