

# Pelvic Floor Exercises

Keeping active and regular exercise is important for continence promotion and maintenance. Both general exercise for total body, bowel and bladder health – and pelvic floor exercises.

The pelvic floor is a large muscle slung across the pelvis from the front to the back. It's similar to a hammock and supports the pelvic and abdominal organs so they are maintained in correct position.

Common causes of a weakened pelvic floor include childbirth, obesity and the associated straining of chronic constipation. Weak pelvic floor muscles are the most common cause of bladder weakness and can lead to urine leakage when laughing, coughing, sneezing or exercising.

## Pelvic floor exercises

Recommended for women and men who experience any urine leakage, pelvic floor exercises are designed to strengthen the muscles located around the bladder opening. Pelvic floor exercises are designed to improve muscle tone, improve symptoms, and prevent the need for corrective surgery.

In order to get the maximum benefit from these exercises, it is very important to perform them correctly.

They can be done anywhere, anytime, while sitting, lying or standing. No one else will know you're doing them.

## Finding the muscles

You can identify the muscles located around the bladder opening by starting and stopping your urine stream. If you are able to stop your stream you are using your pelvic floor muscles. Stopping your urine stream is only a way to identify the pelvic floor muscles. Flow-stopping should not be used as an exercise.

Another way to identify the muscles used for pelvic floor exercises is to tighten the muscles around your back passage (as when holding back wind or at the end of a bowel movement). Because they are part of the same muscle group, the muscles around the back passage always work with the muscles located around the bladder opening.

A proper pelvic floor squeeze also lifts upwards as it squeezes. A hand mirror may be useful to see if you can notice an upward movement when contracting pelvic floor muscles.

When you are doing a pelvic floor muscle contraction, it helps

to pull your bellybutton in towards your spine at the same time. This tummy action will help to achieve a better pelvic floor muscle contraction.

When muscles are weak, it's often difficult to know if they are actually working or not. It may take several tries to locate these muscles. Try not to use your stomach, buttock, or leg muscles. A health care provider can help if you have difficulty identifying your pelvic floor muscles.

## Types of pelvic floor exercises

There are different types of pelvic floor exercises: the quick pelvic floor exercises and the slow pelvic floor exercises. Every pelvic floor muscle squeeze needs to be done as strongly as you possibly can. This is called a maximal squeeze and it is the ONLY way that muscle strength can be improved.

In performing the quick exercises, the pelvic floor muscles are rapidly tightened and relaxed.

During the slow exercises, the muscles are tightened for 3-5 seconds and then relaxed for 3-5 seconds. Try to complete 3-5 maximal slow squeezes, three times a day as well as 3-5 quick squeezes. Pelvic floor exercises may be done with other activities, such as watching television, ironing, or relaxing.

## Things to remember:

- Like all exercises, pelvic floor exercises are most effective when individually tailored and monitored. The exercises described are only a guide and may not help if done incorrectly or if the training is inappropriate.
- Pelvic floor exercises should be done regularly so it's best to set up triggers to remind you
- It's best to empty your bladder first
- Don't hold your breath – breathe normally
- Tighten the pelvic floor muscles not the abdominal or chest area
- It may take several weeks to notice an improvement, however it's important to continue doing these exercises
- If symptoms do not improve, ask your doctor for help.

For more information on bladder or bowel weakness, or **DEPEND®** or **POISE®** absorbent products, **phone 1800 028 334**

or visit

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